THE TIMES
MAGAZINE
15.08.26

CAITLIN MORAN
WHO'LL BE IN MY WILL?

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GIVE IT UP FOR DAMIAN LEWIS!

The actor on surviving loss and making music

By Will Hodgkinson

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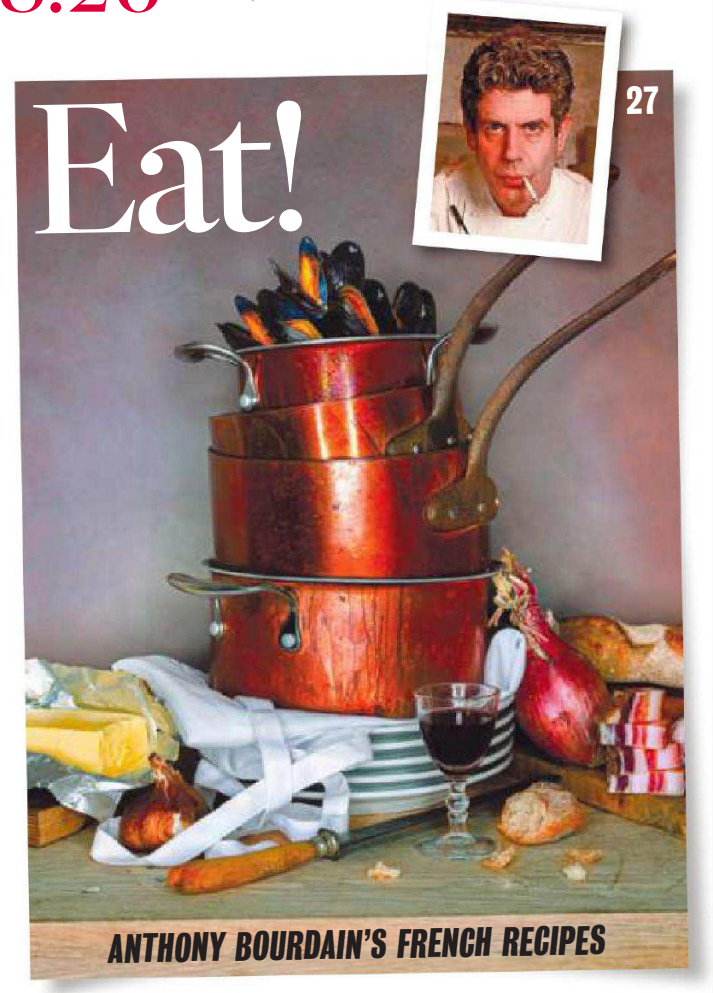

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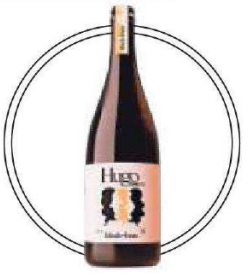

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CAITLIN MORAN

I'm updating my will – which means that I can finally settle some old scores

I set aside a day to chew through the kind of paperwork one mentally files under "Awful Grown-Up Tedium". Mortgage stuff, life insurance, warranties. Everything you'd file in a box labelled "Boring – Until Something Dreadful Happens. Then *Vital*".

Having resentfully yet efficiently dealt with it all, I finally found, at the bottom of the Boring Box, my will – dusty and untouched since the day it was stamped and sent back to me in 2001. Mindful that a will should be regularly updated, I took a look at it – and was horrified to see that, as "executors", I'd put a TV presenter I haven't talked to in 17 years and a vicar who has subsequently moved to Australia.

Not the ideal people to deal with my grieving children, and solicitors – based in Chester – if and when I croak.

"This will needs updating!" I said. "Doing this will be my final, and biggest, piece of Boring Admin for today."

Nine hours later, I can admit, I was both disconsolate and peeved. As the previous will was knocked out when my first child was just six weeks old – in an anxious, postpartum rush – it was a very standard, boilerplate affair. It didn't feel very... *personal*. It simply said that, if I died, everything went to Pete – and if *he* died, in the same terrible shark attack as me, everything went to the kids.

After flicking through the first, dull few pages, I decided that Will 2026 was going to be a *much* more detailed and emotional affair – like the kind of 19th-century wills that are read out aloud in Dickens and Austen. Full of florid tributes to unexpected beneficiaries ("To my devoted and faithful DPD deliveryman – an umbrella! To protect you from the vicissitudes of north London's unseasonable weathers, which harry your noble duties"), and the odd drive-by grudge ("To the GP who described my breasts as 'lumpy' – absolutely *nothing*! Save a moment to reflect on your language, which I also find to be '*lumpy*'.")

And, most importantly, tender and personal bequests. I wanted loads of tender and personal bequests. You know the kind of thing: "To my gentle and fair sister Cheryl – my ivory haircombs and seed-pearl fob watch. To my friend Lauren – my morocco-bound copy of *Rasselas*, and the ormolu inkpot. And to Nadia – the dowager's cottage, in the county of Salop, in memory of all the merry evenings spent taking draughts of laudanum on the ha-ha."

ROBERT WILSON

I try to write a list of my precious objects to bequeath. But all I have is a picture that Jamie Oliver drew for me and an email from David Bowie

I wanted that kind of will very badly.

However, as I walked around the house with a notepad, to write down a list of all my most precious and unusual objects, I reached the final bedroom – page still embarrassingly empty.

How, in the past 51 years, have I collected no fabulous and personal objects? Sure, I've got *stuff* – a very big colander, Le Creuset mugs, an air fryer – but it's the stuff *everyone* has. You don't bequeath that. Bequests are lapis lazuli brooches, elephant-foot umbrella stands, the ship's bell from HMS Invincible. I have *none* of those.

After a three-hour deep-dive, the most "precious and unusual" objects I could find were a) a Hole access-all-areas tour laminate from 1993; b) a picture Jamie Oliver drew of the inside of his head, explaining that 80 per cent of his thoughts were "cheese"; and c) an email from David Bowie, where he said, "That's my girl!"

As much as I treasure all these things, it would be hard to bequeath them. I mean, the email was just... an email. Even if I print it out and put it in a frame, it doesn't feel very *bequeathable*. Presumably we're now in an era where *many* people have, rather than boxes of foolscap correspondence, "precious" emails on their phones – but *those* aren't going to be snapped up by the Bodleian Library archive, as and when they die.

Francis Crick's letter to his son, explaining what DNA is, sold at auction for $6 million. Rainer Maria Rilke's correspondence with a young writer was eventually published as the immortal *Letters to a Young Poet*.

Given this, my 2010 text from Jon Ronson – "Where are you? We're by falafel stall" – sent when we lost each other at Glastonbury, seems very... *mortal*, and unlikely to be published, as part of a volume, for the future inspiration of others.

That's why, in the end, I left the will as it is. Even the terribly out-of-date executors. If I can't leave any of my loved ones precious and unusual objects, at least I can leave them with a precious and unusual diversion from their – doubtless paralysing – grief: ringing a very confused showbiz agent and asking them, "Could you contact your client, and inform them that they are needed to work out which of Caitlin's seven siblings gets the air fryer, and who gets the Le Creuset mugs? I'm sorry. It's just – she seems to have forgotten to update her will." ■

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What I've learnt Katie Piper

Katie Piper, 42, grew up in Hampshire. In 2008, when she was 24, an acid attack by her ex-boyfriend damaged her face and left her partially blind in one eye. The 2009 documentary Katie: My Beautiful Face was nominated for a Bafta. Her Katie Piper Foundation supports burns survivors and she was appointed OBE for services to charity in 2022. She has presented two documentaries about prisons and published several books. She has two daughters with her husband, Richard.

After the attack, my face was an idiot filter. Because I would never attract a man who might fall out of love with me because I've aged or gained weight, or because he meets a younger model – he just wouldn't fancy me in the first place.

When I was growing up, I was told that beauty is one of the most powerful currencies a woman can possess. So when you've lost your beauty, what now? I've learnt that being the most confident woman isn't about being the best-looking woman in the room.

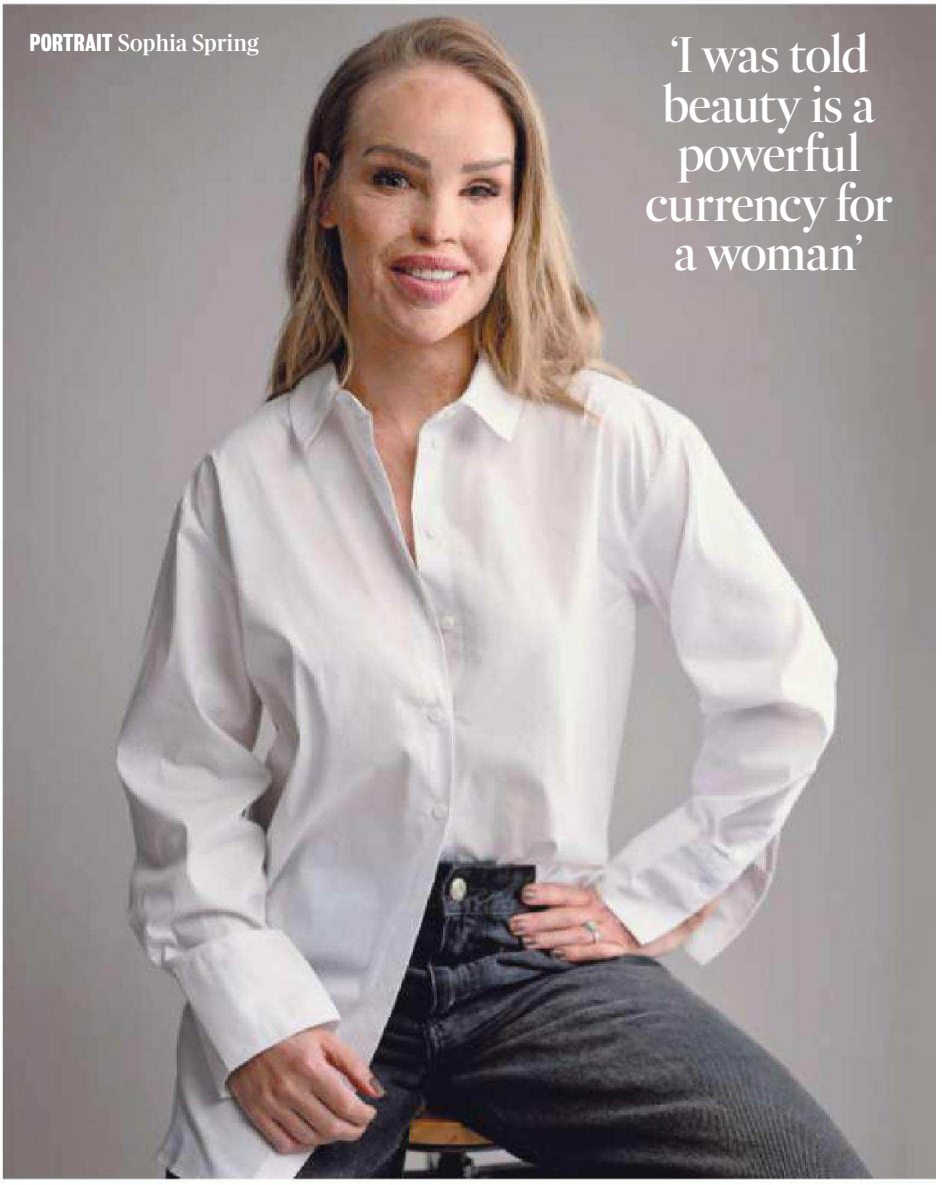
People put a picture of me into AI and said, "Make her normal, perfect, beautiful." Is what they did morally or ethically wrong? I don't know. Did it hurt me? No. Would it hurt someone else who didn't have 20 years of rebuilding confidence and self-esteem? Yes, I think it would.

My mum supported me in hospital. And she has had her own medical journey with cancer. My mum is very stoic – silent but strong. She is not like this [new] generation that would write all their feelings on the internet. I watched her endure lots of things and be very graceful. It inspired me to be like that.

Overall, I don't believe in the incarceration of women. [Piper presented the documentaries *Locked Up in Louisiana* and *Jailhouse Mums*.] I believe in rehabilitation, in other programmes to support and empower women, to get them well again mentally and physically. Often women are defending themselves in domestic violence situations, they have no previous criminal record and in a moment of self-defence they commit murder or serious assault.

I would never say to a burns survivor, "It's what's on the inside that counts. You're beautiful anyway." Because that isn't the truth of the world we live in. Dating now mostly relies on digital apps and photos where those of us who don't fit that box of symmetry may be rejected on a headshot. So it's really unfair to tell people that lie. That doesn't equip them for the world.

I felt close to a lot of the women lifers in prison. I really believe that all of us are one bad decision or one bad day away from that happening to us. We got Parkrun into the prison and we were doing 5ks around the grounds.



PORTRAIT Sophia Spring

INTERVIEW Georgina Roberts

When my career looks like it's going really well, my kids are closer to my husband, and I don't know what bedtime story they like or what's going on at school. But if I'm at home doing Plasticine and baking cakes, I am envious of my colleagues, feeling insecure and worrying that other people have opportunities that I missed out on.

We tried to have a third child, but it just didn't happen. We tried for two and a half years. I was getting into my forties and I was like, I don't want to be 60 at the school gates, so maybe we should stop. We gave up and adopted a puppy instead.

There's a lot of misinformation and scaremongering on social media. My biggest worry is that people are dehumanising others. That's dangerous. We always need to lead with empathy.

I've never been so financially secure. I've never been so successful professionally. My forties are my heyday.

My husband doesn't need a lot of attention – he's not like me. When I got the OBE, they only let you take one person. My husband wasn't around when the reason for my charity work took place [the 2008 acid attack], so he kindly stood down and said, "I shouldn't be your plus-one. It should be your mum or your dad." It was a really good thing to do with Mum, to give her back something that was joyful.

I fell into the trap of my career becoming my identity before I had kids. I learnt the hard way that jobs and TV shows end, book deals might not get renewed, and people change their minds about you. ■

Still Beautiful: Embracing Age with Power and Purpose *by Katie Piper (DK Red, £10.99) is out now in paperback*

‘I ENJOY MUSIC BECAUSE YOU’RE NOT HENRY V, YOU’RE NOT HENRY VIII.’

He’s one of the nation’s greatest actors, with starring roles from Wolf Hall to Homeland – so why is Damian Lewis touring Britain’s clubs in a van? Will Hodgkinson finds out

‘YOU’RE JUST YOU’

Damian Lewis, 55, photographed by Tom Jackson. Styling: Prue White

When one of the great actors of his generation, who made his name bringing Tudor paranoia to Henry VIII in *Wolf Hall* and inner conflict to the American marine turned al-Qaeda operative Nicholas Brody in *Homeland*, releases an album, the first question you are drawn to ask is: why?

"If it's not too bold a claim," Damian Lewis says, "I would like to release some beauty into the world. It's an 18th-century idea: making a piece of work that might just illuminate and transcend, and I feel I have something to say. It's not easy, but a play, a novel or a song can achieve that."

Lewis is a man with a certain solidity about him. Over lunch at Shoreditch House in east London, during a winding conversation that takes in early adventures in music, the roles that have defined him, the death of his actress wife, Helen McCrory, and the forces that drew him to make albums in his fifties, he emanates an old-fashioned strain of Englishness: well mannered and rather stoic, but with a sensitivity that lies hidden under that carapace of propriety. After all, old Etonians don't typically let it all out on songs about love, lust, motorbike crashes and, as Louis MacNeice put it in his poem *Snow*, the drunkenness of things being various. They all feature on *Sweet Chaos*, his follow-up to 2023's *Mission Creep*, on which he made his album debut at 52. As it turns out, making music is an itch that Lewis has been trying to scratch for a long time.

"I was learning classical guitar when I was 12, 13 and I wanted to sing and play," Lewis says of his new, or perhaps old, second career at 55. "And I was busking. At 18, 19, 20, 21 I hopped on a motorbike, took a tent and went round Europe in the summer. I could run from Bowie to the Beatles, from Elvis to Bob Marley... A smorgasbord of well-known songs."

Like so many of us with a reasonable amount of comfort to fall back on have done at some point or another, Lewis was living the bohemian dream: singing for his supper, travelling on his own, making enough money to go from town to town while staying in campsites along the way. "In Avignon, during the theatre festival, I would set up on the river and everyone coming back late at night, drunk or whatever, would sit down and listen. I would be playing to about 100 people and it was fantastic."

In other words, before joining the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1997 and setting off on his life's path, Lewis was a roving troubadour. "I was listening to loads of Fifties rockabilly – Carl Perkins, Eddie Cochran, Elvis Presley – and that's what I was trying to get out of a voice and an acoustic guitar. You listen to Elvis's *Mystery Train* and it's unbelievably rhythmic. It was my first love, and the first album came from that place."

> 'There were songs that were unquestionably about Helen, but it was not an act of therapy'

With his wife, Helen McCrory, in 2013

It would be easy to dismiss Lewis's musical turn as an indulgence, a midlife crisis or, perhaps, as I suggest to him, a form of therapy after the death of McCrory in 2021. He says it was more a case of taking up acting as the (slightly) less risky career option. When he was growing up in St John's Wood in north London, the son of an insurance broker father and a mother who served on the board of the Royal Court, the theatre had a more respectable tinge to it than dreams of rock, or at least singer-songwriter, glory.

"At school I always acted, always sang, always played an instrument. I think because of the culture in which I grew up, of private schools and my parents being theatregoers, it seemed like the right option," he says. "I don't think there was a fork in the road; it wasn't that dramatic. From the age of 16 I felt I wanted to be an actor. My parents were very cool about it and I went to drama school instead of uni. It was the thing that was most knowable, and while I loved doing music, I had no real contact with it beyond being in school bands and busking. It was a passion that would sit alongside the thing I'd make money doing."

Nor was Eton the hotbed of theatrical talent it is sometimes portrayed as, with former pupils Eddie Redmayne, 44, Tom Hiddleston, 45, Dominic West, 56, and Hugh Laurie, 67, spread across the school's alumni over two decades. "Out of 250 people leaving school that year, there were only two people who wanted to do anything in the arts," Lewis points out. "The other guy is called Gresby Nash and he also went to drama school, acted for a bit and became a musician and composer. Back then, stating that you wanted to be an actor felt like the Wild West – not an act of defiance as such, but there just wasn't anyone else doing it."

Coming from the establishment does mean Lewis can get under the skin of patrician figures. He plays Bernard "Monty" Montgomery in the forthcoming *Pressure*, a Second World War drama about the build-up to the D-Day landings, with Andrew Scott's meteorologist arguing against Montgomery and General Eisenhower's plans because of an impending storm. It's a film about Britain's finest hour in the war against Nazi Germany, but it's also about the weather. It doesn't get more English than that.

"There's no getting away from it: *Pressure* is a film about weather forecasts," Lewis accepts. "I had schoolboy knowledge of Monty, our great hero, besting Rommel, the Desert Fox, at Alamein. Then I did some reading around him and he was a complicated character: a man of a certain era and a certain class, repressed, maybe sexually, certainly emotionally. And he had a slightly complicated relationship with young men, whom he kept as pen pals. He married the first woman he had sex with, and then she died and he was never with another woman again."

When I suggest that Lewis's own need to express himself in song may have come from the repression brought by boarding school, given he was sent to Ashdown House in East Sussex at the age of eight, he rejects the idea as armchair psychology. But he does know that world and it shows in his acting. Lewis was never better than in his portrayal of Henry VIII as a godlike figure in *Wolf Hall*, beset with a complex mix of unquestionable authority and psychic torment – a bit like so many survivors of the public-school system, in fact.

"Stanislavski, in his book on acting, wrote about emotional memory: you borrow from your own life and attach it to whatever it is you're playing," Lewis

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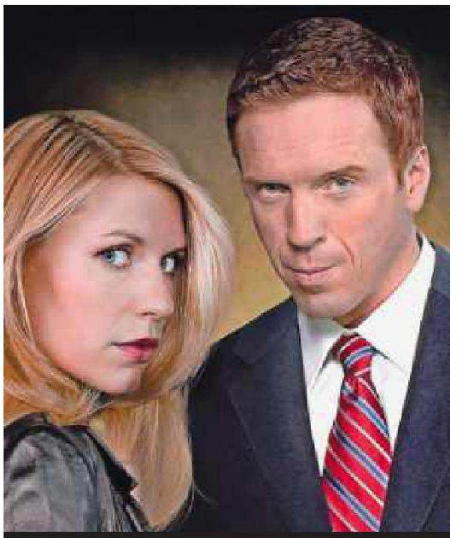
As Bernard Montgomery in his new film, Pressure

Playing Henry VIII in Wolf Hall


With Claire Danes in Homeland

confirms, when I ask if he draws on his own experience to inform his roles. "I don't do that consciously but there's no question it happens subconsciously, and acting is the imaginary journey you take to meet the character in the world he's in. Henry becomes increasingly paranoid. He's frustrated with his health and he feels the weight of being a monarch, which he believes is his divine right. But one of Henry's strengths was that he liked men of the world, like Wolsey and Cromwell. He promoted them. He elevated them. And then he killed them."

I put it to Lewis that he may share something of Henry VIII's approach. "Executions?" he inquires casually, catching my eye over a forkful of new potatoes. "Assassinations?"

I was thinking more of shaking off the shackles of fame and getting out on the road in a rock'n'roll band, just as Henry enjoyed the company of the sons of butchers and blacksmiths. "I was always putting together bands at the end of shoots, playing at the wrap party, and it's amazing how many musicians are now working in props or the sound department," he says by way of answer. "They pull out a bass, say, 'Yeah, I nearly had a record deal when I was 24,' and turn out to be incredibly talented. But you know how hard it is for musicians to make it."

Lewis's own break, musically speaking, came after he sang a handful of jazz standards on a Radio 2 show and a man in the audience called Steve Abbott, who is now his manager, suggested recording some material. "By then I was used to being an actor so it was quite left-field, but I thought: life is short. Why not? Now I've spent the past five years of my life making two albums and loving it."

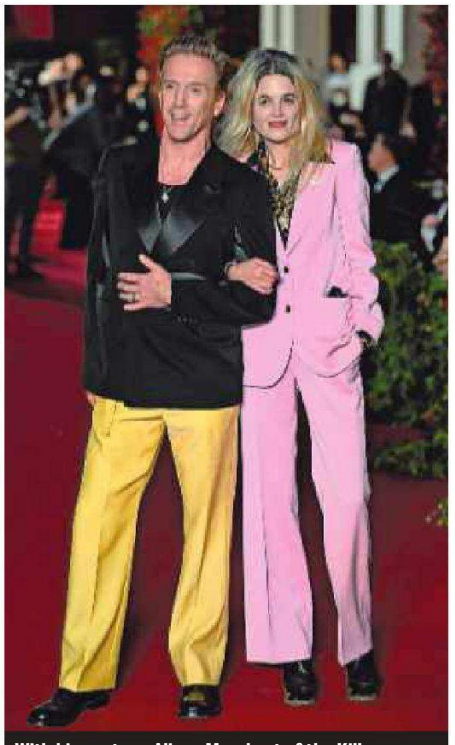
Does he suffer from impostor syndrome? "I make most of my decisions out of instinct and it felt natural, so the answer is no. But to other people, looking in, the decisions you make might seem either courageous or foolish. I never feel that way. I had things I wanted to say and, although it was in a different medium, the central proposition is the same: telling stories to get to the nub of the thing that makes us all tick. There is a lot of cross-pollination."

When Lewis released the jazzy, languid, rather sad *Mission Creep* in 2023 it was just two years after the death of McCrory, mother to his children, Manon and Gulliver, now 19 and 18, when she was 52. "I started [writing songs on the album] before Helen died," he says, at the suggestion that her death prompted the need to make sense of it in song. "But if you accept that an album is like a journal, even if you're Bruce Springsteen and you're writing about New Jersey, it's going to be infused with where you are at the time. So yes, there are songs that are unquestionably about Helen, or loss, but it's not an act of therapy."

What was McCrory like? "She was a great actress with an artist's soul and way of thinking, and she was curious. And she loved Bob Dylan more than anyone." Was she encouraging of his new direction? "She was, but in all honesty she was ill by then and we were dealing with bigger things. There wasn't a lot of chat about it."

During the recording of that first album, there were times when Lewis thought he was hitting something euphoric and energised. It's only when he listened back to songs like *Wanna Grow Old in Paris* and *She Comes*, which are clearly about McCrory, that he saw how much his grief had affected the tone. "It must have been because of my state of mind, because I was fragile," he says. "Now I realise what a tender record it is. It's the same as making a movie: your own moods and personality infuse it, so it ends up as something you didn't necessarily intend. Occasionally I play back my first album and think, 'I really like that. I wonder who did it?'"

This time round, Lewis has gone towards rock and folk with a bit of big-voiced balladry thrown in. The title track to *Sweet Chaos*, a portrait of a "charming man, never vulgar or rude", has shades of Scott Walker's overarching drama. "I think it's about relinquishing control in the ➨


With his partner, Alison Mosshart of the Kills

'At 18 I was busking around Europe with a tent and a motorbike. It was fantastic'

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chaos of life," Lewis says of the song. "In grief, in chaos, all you can be is in the moment. You cannot control it and it is oddly freeing. On top of that, our minds have been scattered by the modern world and if you're someone who is prone to anxiety about forgetting the thing you're meant to do at the end of the week, it can be difficult. As my mum said: make lists."

It's not all big themes. *Pentonville Prison* is about a motorbike crash Lewis had on the London street of the title. *Grey at the Temples* is a sweet, folky tune about having a bad memory. And there is a jaunty song with the less than delightful title of *Leech*, the subject of which has made me rather nervous. "So we talk about the weather and you compliment my sweater and you ask me where I got my boots from," it goes. "You say they look designer, must have cost more than a fiver, and I wonder where this question comes from." A lot of actors are wary of journalists. Only a few of them immortalise a journalist's duplicity in song.

"I don't like dishonesty," Lewis says of the experience, which sounds like a familiar scenario: lots of compliments during the interview and an unfavourable profile afterwards, or at least one that Lewis read as unfavourable. "This person behaved badly, so there's a song. That's all you need to know."

Having a public profile clearly provides material to write about. Many years ago Lewis had a stalker, who showed up to first nights before ending up writing letters with increasingly violent threats. "In the end, the studio I was working with in Los Angeles put out an injunction and she left me alone," Lewis says, when I ask if a song called *No Man's Land*, with its words about love smelling like blood, is about the incident. "Actually it's not about her, but it is my most paranoid song: love as an act of aggression. Love should always be wonderful, but there are periods in life when it is not. People reading this might think, 'What a weirdo,' but love can feel oddly hostile. It's to do with one's state of mind."

These days Lewis has a new girlfriend, Alison Mosshart, the Florida-born singer of the scuzzy rock duo the Kills. When I ask if she has been an influence, he says he would rather not talk about her beyond confirming that she's been supportive of his new direction. What he will say is that he has signed up for the privations of the touring life, with its motorway service station meals and pitiful fees, at least as much as acting commitments allow. He's off again in October, doing it, he says, for the love of the music.

"We get in the back of a van and go charging across the country," he says. "Typically I'm playing before 250-400 people, and I really enjoy it because you're not Henry V, you're not Henry VIII: you're just you. And it has to wash its own face. That's what you step into, slightly unwittingly. I just wanted to write some songs and now, with everyone in the band getting paid, I'm running a business. I'm not touring like Oasis. It's playing the clubs and travelling in a splitter van. We're playing at the Garage [in London, October 14.] You can come, Will. Abandon your big revival concerts. Slum it with the real people."

I can indeed, although one of the real people I'll be slumming it with is Damian Lewis, star of *Band of Brothers*, *Homeland*, *Billions* and many, many more. He has to admit, he does have a leg up over the average singer-songwriting hopeful.

"Well, that might be good once," he concludes. "But in the long run it's unhelpful." Because you've got to prove more? "I think so." And with that, Damian Lewis picks up the bill for the both of us. ■

Sweet Chaos is out now. Damian Lewis is on tour from October (damian-lewis.com). Pressure is in cinemas from September 9

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'Making music was left-field, but life is short'

Lewis's first gig, at Omeara, London, in 2022

I RISKED MY LIFE TO GET MY ABUSIVE PARTNER CONVICTED – AND JAILED FOR 23 YEARS

Godley systematically made a record of her injuries

Lucy Godley's partner seemed like a loving, caring man. But when she fell pregnant, he embarked on a horrifying campaign of physical and sexual abuse. Fearing for her life, she and her mother carried out a secret and dangerous plan that would, eventually, save her

Louise Carpenter reports

Lucy Godley, 29, photographed by Suki Dhanda

Cadbury
the taste of
a glass and a half

When Lucy Godley went into labour in December 2021, two weeks early, no questions were asked about why. She was 24, she delivered her daughter naturally with an epidural and she appeared to have a loving partner who held her hand throughout. Less than an hour later, with her baby lying beside her in the hospital bassinet, the new mother sensed that danger loomed. Her boyfriend's mood flipped. His eyes had blackened. Deranged accusations of sexual infidelity would follow.

"I could feel it coming," she remembers. "I thought, 'Should I ask the nurses for help? Do I say something?'" The nurse left the room and her boyfriend, that same man who had put on a loving show during labour, assaulted her in the hospital bed as their baby lay by her side. He assaulted her later too in their bedroom after they drove their daughter, Lyla, home in her car seat. She was a "slag" and "slut" and the baby wasn't his. "It wasn't even an hour later," she says of the hospital attack. "He then started crying. He used to just flip. It's hard to describe but he would look totally different. His pupils would change and when I saw those big black pupils I'd think, 'Oh my God.' And as the assaults got worse and he got away with them, I think he got a thrill out of it. The antenatal unit had seen I was covered in bruises but I explained them away as being the results of seizures."

Those seizures, however, had been brought on by chronic stress, starting shortly after his first acts of violence towards her in the summer of 2021 when she was 20 weeks' pregnant, "when he knew I was stuck with him". He kicked her in the legs with steel-capped boots, strangled her and bit the backs of her arms. It was just the start.

She had begun dating him in January 2021, her 23, him 21, both from Portsmouth, on the rebound from a recently ended relationship with the father of her two-year-old son, Arthur (they successfully co-parent Arthur). She knew of her new boyfriend through friends. Nobody spoke of any history of violence. Nobody knew of any propensity for rage. "It was green flags all the way," she says. "He was loving, held doors open for me, wanted to pay for meals and above all was wonderful with my son. When I told him that my son mattered more than anything else, he was completely in agreement."

Domestic abuse is common in the UK. Figures from the charity Refuge show that one in four women in England and Wales will experience abuse in their lifetime. On average, one woman is killed by an abusive partner every five days in England and Wales, and the police receive a domestic abuse-related call every 30 seconds. And yet it is estimated that fewer than 24 per cent of domestic abuse cases are reported. Crown Prosecution Service figures for last year (ending March 2025) show that 74.7 per cent of cases brought to court were successful (41,070 convictions), but 13,917 cases were not successful; 2,167 of these were acquittals and 6,624 unsuccessful cases were seen as "victim-related", either through a victim backing out – probably out of fear – or through non-attendance. A further 4,191 were as a result of conflicting evidence or "missing legal elements".

LUCYGODLEY/INSTAGRAM

Another of the images used as evidence

'The first thing on your mind when you are being assaulted is survival. Quite literally'

The success rate is encouraging but there are thousands of examples where lawyers working for women are unable to get cases over the finish line. They provide context for the story that Lucy Godley, now 29 and finally free of the man who she feared would kill her, is brave enough to tell.

As of March, and after a harrowing two-week trial, her attacker is now in prison for 23 years, guilty of 10 out of 11 counts of violence, including sexual violence, against her. Her case illustrates not just her bravery and resilience, but also how even when she feared for her life she had a full, bleak understanding of how the system was stacked against her and what was needed. She began gathering the evidence in a well thought-through plan also involving her mother. She knew it was necessary if she had any chance of putting him away. She was right.

She collected photos and videos of her wounds and injuries and stored them in a secret file; these photos showed her often minutes after an attack, or later, black and blue, and were sent to her mother as part of their plan. Her attacker found those pictures on her phone after six months and deleted the lot. "But I had plenty more I'd been sending."

As a victim, she is far from alone. Only recently, a woman in the southwest who was beaten unconscious had the foresight to hide her phone in a flowerbed after dialling 999 just beforehand. The operator thought she was hearing the woman being beaten to death on the line. How has it come to this? The footage shows officers arriving to ask, "Is she still breathing?"

Today, the newborn baby from that hospital room is playing outside the room where Godley and I talk. She is now four and she pushes a pram with a doll in it, playing mother. She has no idea of what life was like for her own mother when she was the size of the doll and being pushed in a pram. Godley's son is now seven. They all still live in Portsmouth. An indefinite restraining order is in place. Godley's abuser will not see his daughter unless she decides to contact him once she reaches 18.

Between the summer of 2021, when Godley was 20 weeks' pregnant, through to October 2023, she was regularly beaten. Her head was smashed with a glass diffuser, its contents poured over her face causing burns. From the summer of 2022, she was sexually assaulted as part of the violence, for which she needed hospital care but never sought it.

Her abuser's sentence of 23 years comprised not an amalgamation of years for the abuses involved in the separate counts but one whole sentence of 22 years for the last attack. This involved a steak knife that was held at her neck on the kitchen floor while he carried out a brutal sexual assault. It was considered to be so serious that, when issuing the ruling, the judge went to the 22-year ceiling of the sentencing bracket. The one additional year, taking the total to 23, was for witness intimidation. Her ex-boyfriend had issued death threats to her and her family.

"That last time, I wasn't scared of dying for myself," she says. "I was scared of him killing me and my children being the ones who found my body. That's what I told the judge." Her abuser is now appealing against both his conviction and sentence.

Godley has a huge following on social media, built from posting content she made initially as therapy for herself and is now free to share online. Doorbell footage of her friends returning to her home to tell her of the guilty verdict shows her collapsing into their arms in relief. It went viral with 21 million views. After living in such darkness for so long, Godley, through her posts, is trying to bring domestic abuse into the daylight, exposing it for what it ➡

is so that other women feel less alone: "I'm about helping others now."

She is free now but distrustful of the court system. "Individual police officers were brilliant but ultimately it is the victim who is on trial, not the perpetrator." She almost walked away from the trial and, she says, "The only time I ever felt safe was when he was in prison."

Her win was about as good as it could have been, but it came as a result of putting herself at immense risk. In gathering a body of evidence with the help of her mother, Sharon, she essentially turned into a detective on her own case. And in the process she and her mother became very ill.

"The first thing on your mind when you are being assaulted is survival," Godley says. "Quite literally. You don't naturally think, let's get my phone out and record this. You are always safety planning. When he is strangling you, you are thinking, how do I get his fingers from my throat? When he is throwing something at you, you don't think, I'm taking a picture."

Except she saw that you have to think like that to escape in the long term, "because there is no life with him".

By the second part of 2022, Godley had reached breaking point. Her boyfriend controlled her movements, had access to her bank account and restricted her contact with others. Her mother had suspected what was happening much earlier but Godley had denied it.

Eventually, she confessed. Her injuries were all over her face for everybody to see: black eyes, split lip – and there were the internal injuries nobody could see too. Godley came up with a plan. (The first time her mother saw the bruises during Godley's pregnancy, she became hysterical and wanted to phone the police. Her daughter convinced her she had fallen down the stairs.)

It would take Godley a year between 2022 and 2023 to secretly build the evidence she needed.

Godley is, of course, a victim of trauma, but today she is also defined by that act of bravery.

Her dossier of photographic evidence was later verified by the police to be genuine. It proved her case. And yet it feels bleak in what it reveals about British law and how much is demanded of domestic abuse victims in standing up their allegations.

"Of course, my mum wanted to go to the police. We argued about it all the time but I sat her down and said, 'I've hardly got any evidence. It's really hard to provide evidence of sexual assault.' I said, 'Mum, I've been on Google. I've been looking for help. We have to do this.' By then I understood the success rates for [convictions for] domestic violence

were so low [without proper evidence]. And I knew he'd make my life hell. He'd already threatened to kill me if I went to the police.

"Mum was heartbroken. But I said to her, 'Either you help me do this and we put him away or he will get worse.' It was very, very difficult for her. She lost so much weight. I was down to six stone too.

"She had to look at pictures of me with black eyes, burns on my face. She'd often have to put her phone down before going to bed after I'd sent her the latest picture. But she never slept. She told me later she'd always be weighing up: do I ring the police now and ruin [the plan] for Lucy? Or do I not ring the police and then one day get a call from them to say, 'I'm sorry, your daughter Lucy has been killed'?

"It's been really difficult for Mum. I know a lot of people have since [talked about] my bravery, but it's my mum's too. People have criticised her on social media since finding out what she did, saying, how could she have watched it play out? It's because of my mum that we got that 23-year sentence. She is my hero.

"I'd plan ahead with my phone. I learnt to count his footsteps. If he went to the kitchen [after abusing me], I knew I'd have 20 seconds to take and send the picture to my mum. I'd keep my phone nearby. I knew I only had a tiny window."

If she sensed an attack coming, she would try to set up her phone on record.

She stored her pictures in a secret Snapchat file. She does not advocate this for other victims because he caught her. It was exhausting trying to keep safe 24/7 while staying three steps ahead on evidence gathering.

"I had been ready to go to the police. He deleted the whole lot. That's when I started being under house arrest. He put a tracker on my phone. I didn't see my mum for three months."

At her work at a care home, he would turn up and get her into the smoking area where he would pinch her leg, a sign of control. "There is such shame for the victim. As if somehow you have made them do this to you. You get told that a lot. And for a long time, I loved him. He'd show remorse. He would hold Lyla and say he'd protect her." Until the next time.

"What he didn't know was that I'd been sending images to my mum. I phoned her and said, 'We need to be more careful. I am going to send you stuff as soon as I can and then delete it my end. Do not message me back asking if I'm OK. He might see your text and know what we are doing.'"

Latterly, the police were involved. Some visits were prompted by neighbours hearing her screams. These were met by his denials and accusations that she was his abuser. He told her she'd lose her children. Then she began to call the police herself. "Please don't say I called you," she'd tell the operator. But the officers would arrive and say, "We got a call from somebody called Lucy..." He'd be dragged away only to be released 24 hours later, leaving her in even more danger than she was before.

The scenes that Godley describes are beyond imaginable. After the last attack, before he was charged, he was hiding in a wardrobe. A police officer opened one door but not the other. They were called back again and finally found him hiding under the bed, but even then she had to tip off her friend who called 999 saying, "Tell the officers he's hiding under the bed."

Godley cries twice during our two hours together. Both times are prompted by thinking about what other people went through as a result of her abuse, mostly her mother but also her friends. She was numb for a lot of the time she was with him. When he was arrested, her mental health plummeted.

She lost a lot of friends as a result. It was too hard for them to watch her go back to him during the abuse. "Yes," she says, "I did love him." But she knows that it was the friendship group that she sent to court to hear the verdict that would have got her through had the outcome gone another way. "I'd have felt suicidal, but I knew if they were with me, they'd have supported me."

Her abuser's conviction is everything, "particularly because I was believed on the sexual assault". In October, she is running a half-marathon for Women's Aid.

"My friends came over in the heatwave. 'Look at you,' they said. 'What do you mean?' I asked. 'The back door is open!' And it was. I'm not frightened any more." ■

Refuge can be contacted at refuge.org.uk; for Women's Aid, go to womensaid.org.uk. The National Domestic Abuse Helpline is 0808 2000 247

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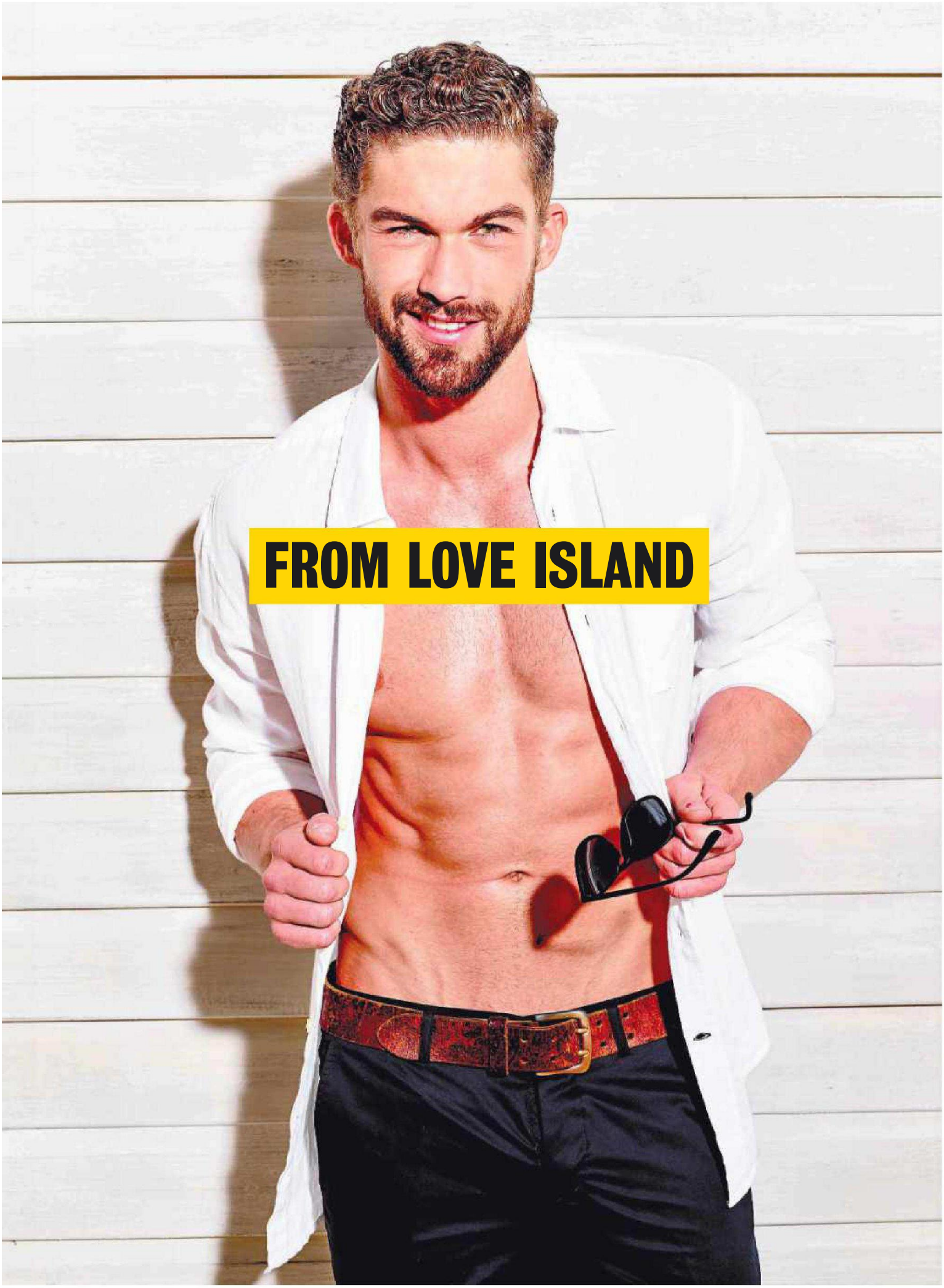

FROM LOVE ISLAND

TO WORLD'S TOP PODCASTER

Chris Williamson is a former nightclub promoter from Teesside who appeared on the first season of Love Island. Now his podcast has been downloaded more than a billion times – making it one of the most influential in the world.
By Mark Smith

Chris Williamson, 38, photographed by Chris Davis. Opposite: on Love Island in 2015

To mark the billionth download of his interview podcast, *Modern Wisdom*, Chris Williamson rented the biggest digital video wall in Texas to recreate the dusty plains of a near-future American midwest: a homage to the Christopher Nolan film *Interstellar*, which stars Matthew McConaughey.

The spectacular set was in honour of a star guest: McConaughey himself, who obliged Williamson with a two-hour conversation in which the pair discussed the MeToo movement (both think it inadvertently made good men feel ashamed of their masculinity) and the difference between being a nice guy and a good man, often finishing each other's sentences approvingly.

It became one of the most-shared episodes of Williamson's podcast. This viral 1,000th episode was a marker of how far Williamson, 38, a former model and nightclub promoter from Stockton-on-Tees, had come. It also spoke to the changed fortunes of podcasters. Podcasting now has cultural and political clout – and from its "bootstrapped" beginnings in Williamson's bedroom in Newcastle, last year *Modern Wisdom* placed eighth in Spotify's global year-end chart.

Williamson is talking to me from his office in Austin, Texas, a city that has quietly become a magnet for podcasters, provocateurs and self-made media figures – among them Joe Rogan (number one on Spotify) and Andrew Huberman, both of whom have appeared on *Modern Wisdom*. Williamson is wearing a T-shirt, tight enough to explain how he became a cover model for steamy novels in the "dark romance" genre. "My mum asked for copies and she is not allowed to read them," he says.

Modern Wisdom's core terrain is male self-improvement. The other, related, one is evolutionary psychology.

This can be controversial territory, especially when his podcast subjects are merchandised via clickbaity contractions ("Why Modern Women Are Failing") or clipped down to bald pronouncements about, say, declining birthrates. "Evolutionary psychology and behavioural genetics are the two horsemen of the academic cancellation apocalypse," he jokes, before adding, "I'm not saying that because something is there, it's good. Analysis is not justification."

One female critic recently wrote that the podcast "features an impressive parade of contrarians and pseudo-experts".

His guest list is cited by other critics as evidence of a particular worldview: Jordan Peterson, Douglas Murray and Konstantin Kisin – men who think men are unfairly maligned, biology is destiny and progressive institutions have failed.

A weeks-long deep dive of his content on YouTube seems to have resulted in that platform thinking that I, a married gay man of 45, could be in the market for "a bride from abroad". But guests have also included the Democratic senator Bernie Sanders and the British porn star Bonnie Blue.

He has just signed a deal with Penguin, making him a stablemate of his hero, Alain de Botton, another repeat guest. Neutonic, the nootropic drink he co-founded, is stocked in Sainsbury's, Tesco and Walmart. He is preparing to bring his live show, *Mostly Wise*, to sold-out venues across the UK.

The unlikely wormhole into this universe was the ITV2 reality show *Love Island*. In the summer of 2015, Williamson, then 27, was the first contestant to walk through the doors of the Mallorcan villa when the revived format launched its first series. Williamson knew the cast of MTV's *Geordie Shore* via his work as a club promoter and DJ, and considered *Love Island* a shrewd career move, like ascending to "the Champions League of being a professional party boy".

On one of the weekly fallow days when there was no coupling up and minimal filming – when producers would instruct contestants to be "as uninteresting as possible" – Williamson kicked back with a fellow contestant, Jordan, and explained at length the science of gravitational time dilation as described by the physicist Kip Thorne in his companion book to the aforementioned *Interstellar*.

"I'm not sure that is canonical garden-variety club-promoter chat," Williamson says. What he did not know or had forgotten that day was that his microphone was live. When he emerged the following morning and went to the canteen, two sound engineers appeared at his shoulder, eager for more. "The only thing you could guarantee wouldn't be broadcast was the only thing these people, who'd been listening to everything I'd said for three weeks, cared about," he says. "That was fascinating." Is it too tidy to think of this as a lightbulb moment? Probably, he says. "Life must be lived forwards," he says, paraphrasing the 19th-century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, "but it only makes sense in reverse."

At the time Williamson was growing up there, Stockton-on-Tees was notable for having the highest teen pregnancy rate in England. "Then it lost that," he says, with sardonic affection. He is the first person in his family to complete a university degree. His mother worked as a travelling marketing rep for Colman's Foods and Clintons Cards – "a very independent, high-powered job for a woman to have through the Eighties", he notes. His father had left school at 16, "no O-levels", and became a blue-collar engineer. "I really had the two ends of the barbell."

He made enough to pay for his master's degree in cash – 'I handed over eight grand in a shoe box'

With Daisy Muller on Love Island, 2015

An only child, he was sensitive, introverted and, by his own account, "chronically unpopular in school" and "bullied quite a bit". Cricket was his distinguishing feature. He played to such a high level that a sympathetic admissions tutor at Newcastle University reduced his entry requirements so he could play for the university team.

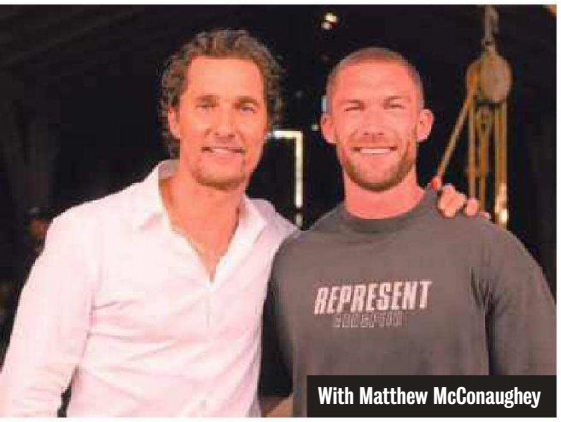
He arrived in Newcastle in 2006 to study business management. "A lot of people were from significantly more highfalutin' institutions than I was: boarding school, private school. There weren't many that had come from the kind of background that I was from." After freshers week left him broke, he found common cause with a neighbour in his quantitative methods seminar, Luke Betts from Hull, who suggested they get into flyering for local clubs (Betts is still his business partner today).

This was Williamson's first foray into a fruitful career in club promotion. He became a regional promoter for a brand of pub crawls across university towns called Carnage. "Your T-shirt was your ticket and there were tasks on the back [for example]: swap shoes with a random." In October 2009, a Sheffield Hallam student wearing one was photographed urinating on a poppy wreath on top of a war memorial during an event. It was, Williamson admits, a shameful episode and "a f***ing headache" for Carnage. "The T-shirt bar crawl and the lairy British culture has been muted by many things," he says. "People caring about health and the cost of living. But I think it's also the fact that you can be captured on camera and put on the internet for the rest of time."

Carnage made him enough money to pay in cash for a master's in international

OPENING SPREAD: ITV/SHUTTERSTOCK. THIS SPREAD: WENN, CHRISWILLX/INSTAGRAM

He smuggled Viagra into the Love Island villa and was voted best torso (he didn't use the pills)



With Matthew McConaughey

marketing. "Eight grand in a Converse shoebox," he says. "Put it down in front of the ladies in the admissions office, who looked at it in absolute horror." He says he ultimately became disenchanted with further education. "Uni was the set of train tracks that I was on, but the actual game that I was playing was that I wanted to be great at business."

By his mid-twenties he was running his own events across the northeast and spending "30 weeks a year in Ibiza". He was the modern multihyphenate: "DJ, commercial male model, promoter – basically all the red flags that you don't want in your future son-in-law," he says.

He smuggled five Viagra pills into the *Love Island* villa in the lining of his washbag. Despite being deemed, via a task where the girls created a photographic composite of the boys' parts, the male housemate with the best torso, he didn't find a use for his pills and was voted off in episode 16 for not having "come out of his shell". This was correct, he says, but not in the sense that was implied. What he was suppressing "wasn't lairiness, but sensitivity". He cried when he left – not for the girls ("I didn't have a single romantic emotion") but for his "boys".

Three years later, in June 2018, he made an episode of his fledgling tiny podcast about the experience of participating in *Love Island*. In it he spoke in passing about Sophie Gradon, a contestant from season two whom he described as "cut from a similar cloth: a little bit mindful, a little bit introverted, keen intellectual interests". He said he knew she had been struggling. He predicted, with horrible accuracy, that the exposure the show generated would claim casualties. "There's going to be someone who goes on like me, plays a role... gets put on a pedestal and realises, shit, the game is over and I can't take the costume off." Ten days after the episode went live, Gradon had died by suicide.

When I raise this with him, he goes quiet. "To hear that back is harrowing. The hairs on my arm are standing up," he says. He knew Gradon and considered her a friend. "She was the girlfriend of a friend of mine. She lived in the house behind my house a year before that." Then came the death of the season three contestant Mike Thalassitis and then the show's presenter, Caroline Flack, whom Williamson knew socially. "The environment of mass social media exposure for people who are not prepared for it – it's so unreal, so surreal if you're the kind of person who actually takes things to heart," he says.

"I burnt every bridge with ITV for doing that," he says of that podcast episode, recorded as soon as the non-disclosure agreement with the broadcaster had expired. But it got *Modern Wisdom* past the 1,000 YouTube subscribers required to monetise the account. "That was the handing off of an old world to a new one," he says. For the first 800 episodes, he "found every guest myself, wrote every script, recorded every ad read, mastered every audio file, designed every thumbnail. Up until one or two in the morning, repeatedly, for years."

THE 10 MOST POPULAR PODCASTS IN THE WORLD

1. The Joe Rogan Experience
2. The Diary of a CEO by Steven Bartlett
3. The Mel Robbins Podcast
4. Call Her Daddy by Alex Cooper
5. This Past Weekend with Theo Von
6. Huberman Lab by Andrew Huberman
7. Crime Junkie by Ashley Flowers
8. Modern Wisdom by Chris Williamson
9. On Purpose with Jay Shetty
10. The Tucker Carlson Show

The move to America was about "fishing where the fish are", according to Betts. When I ask Williamson about his admiration for Joe Rogan – still the "final boss" of his social anxiety, the man whose show makes his heart rate spike even now – I raise Rogan's repeated platforming of Alex Jones, the conspiracy theorist who told the parents of Sandy Hook murder victims that their children's deaths were staged. Is that a line Williamson wouldn't cross? He is careful in his reply. He talks about "the law of large numbers" – implying that, with so many guests on his own show there are bound to have been some kooks. "There will be people that believe birds aren't real. There will be people that believe Antarctica doesn't exist." He does not quite answer the question. "Once you keep bringing people back who have got claims and credibility issues," he eventually offers, "there's a different kind of culpability."

What he had not anticipated was a personal health crisis when the property he rented turned out to be riddled with mould. "My health deteriorated," he says. "I forgot words. One day I looked down and I'd forgotten how to tie my shoes. I couldn't bear the smell of standing water. I couldn't bear the smell of cut grass. I couldn't bear the sound of porcelain. This is all nervous system interacting with environment, being tuned up."

Over the past two years he has flown to Lithuania for natural killer cell infusions, to Mexico to spend three days in a hospital with a line in his jugular cleaning his blood, and to Vienna for what he calls "whole-body hyperthermia" – being held at a forced temperature of 40C for four hours to make the body inhospitable to microbes. "I've had two full-time jobs for two years," he says. "The mould and the show."

This chapter sits ambiguously with a man who has built a following on the rigours of self-improvement. On one hand, it's very on-brand: self-optimisation through cherry-picking from a menu that mainstream medicine hasn't necessarily validated. He has text access, he notes, to figures ranging from Gabrielle Lyon, a physician who specialises in "muscle-centric medicine", to Bryan Johnson, the tech millionaire attempting to biologically reverse his ageing at a cost of $2 million a year.

On the other hand, he has had to contemplate his limits. "I've been very gentle with myself for the past two years," he says. "I've trained less hard, pushed less hard. Slept more." He has begun to worry, he says, that the culture he helped to create has curdled into what he terms grindslop. "Sometimes personal development can feel like homework. You feel like you're never doing enough, no matter how hard you are working."

If footage from previous tours is representative, when the *Mostly Wise* tour reaches the UK in October, the post-show meet-and-greets (from £140 at the London Apollo) are likely to include people who credit him with saving their lives. One review on Ticketmaster attests to *Modern Wisdom* as "a world of comfort".

A recent episode, "The Painful Psychological Cost of Becoming a Dad", featured an interview with the clinical psychologist Dr Darby Saxbe. I ask Williamson whether he sees fatherhood in his future. He is 38 and unmarried, he replies, so a golden retriever is likely to come first. "I've spent a long time working on myself... I'm so excited for that adventure, when it happens," he says. But for now the goal is simple: "To have people feeling less alone." ■

‘I’ve tried every painkiller and treatment, but every day I’m in debilitating, crippling agony’

GENERATION PAIN

WHY ARE SO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE SUFFERING IN SILENCE?

The proportion of young people experiencing chronic pain has risen sharply – and it’s not because they have ‘gone soft’. Jack Burke, 31, right, who lives with constant shoulder pain, investigates

From left: Jack Burke photographed by Tom Jackson; Jenny Tong, 29, and Will Catchpole, 31, photographed by Tim Jobling. Styling: Susie Lethbridge

Story continues on page 34

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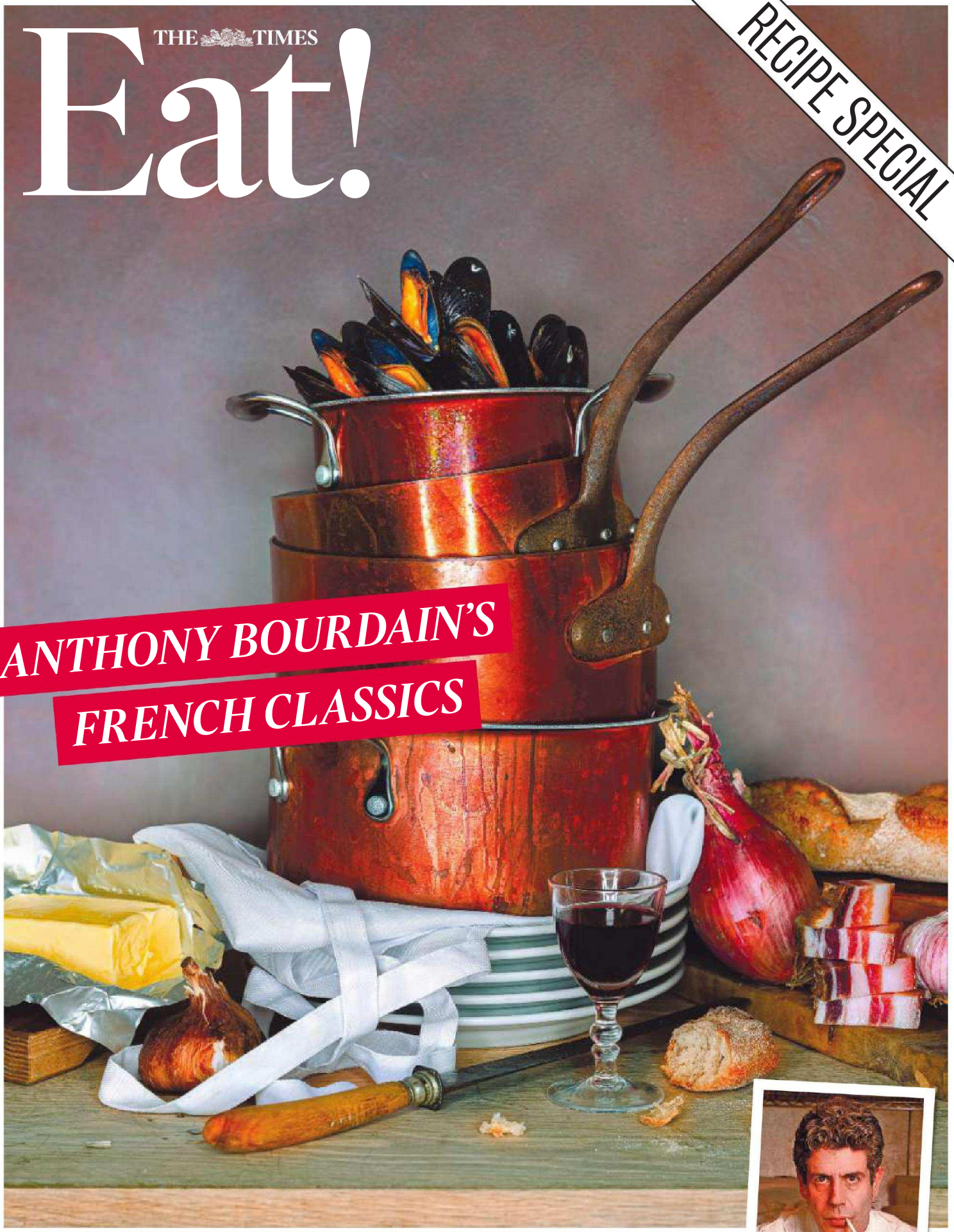
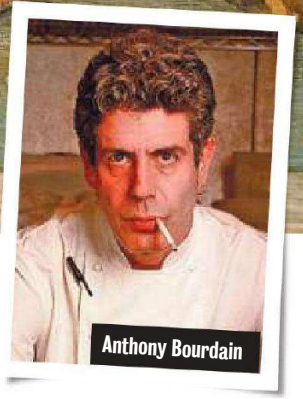


A new film celebrates the original bad boy chef, a true one-off with the recipes to prove it



Anthony Bourdain

I spiked an article by Anthony Bourdain long before he became famous. Years later, I still regret it, Tony Turnbull admits

Tony, the film released yesterday about a formative summer in the teenage life of Anthony Bourdain, will introduce the irascible American chef to a new audience more than eight years after he took his own life at the age of 61 while filming in France. It just shows that the writer, presenter, iconoclast and professional grouch is still able to draw us in from the other side of the kitchen door in the sky.

I have my own place as a footnote in his story. *The Anthony Bourdain Reader*, a collection of his unknown essays and writings published last year, included one piece about life in a US restaurant, which was described as having been commissioned by The Times of London but not published for unknown reasons. Now I can reveal that, yes, that reason was me. I'd spiked it.

In my defence, this was back in the mid-Nineties when Bourdain saw himself more as a writer of fiction than a chronicler of New York's culinary underbelly. *Bone in the Throat*, a satirical mafioso novel, was an all right book, but the piece he wrote to promote it felt too insidery and, if I'm honest, too far-fetched to land with British readers still in thrall to fine dining and country house hotels.

How I regretted that decision after the huge success in 2000 of his gritty memoir, *Kitchen Confidential*, in which he enthralled and terrified in equal measure as he described the chaotic, drug-fuelled yet deeply disciplined glamour of life in a professional kitchen. It encouraged a generation of misfits to sharpen their knives and try their luck as chefs.

Bourdain's immense popularity stemmed from his complete lack of pretence and his magnetic rock'n'roll sensibility. In an era dominated by polished celebrity chefs, Bourdain offered unvarnished truth, celebrating line cooks, dishwashers and street-food vendors over fine dining. A former heroin addict, he admitted that if the kitchen hadn't saved him, he'd have "ended up sticking up liquor stores".

He was also a master storyteller who changed the face of food and travel in programmes such as *A Cook's Tour* and *No Reservations*, where he approached the unfamiliar and bizarre with a gonzo-like enthusiasm. "The only thing I didn't eat was live monkey brain. I'm not going to torment a monkey for novelty, and I had

Anthony Bourdain

PREVIOUS SPREAD: ROMAS FOORD, GETTY IMAGES. THIS SPREAD: BOBBY FISHER, BOB GRUEN, ROMAS FOORD, GETTY IMAGES

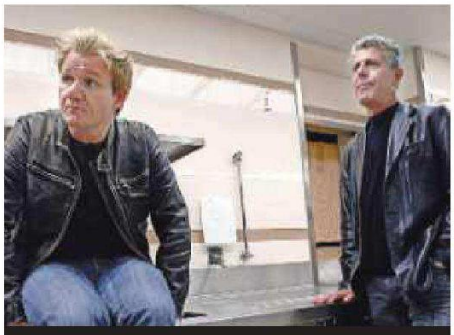
Dominic Sessa, centre, as Bourdain in the new film Tony, with Antonio Banderas, left, and Leo Woodall

no expectation that it would taste good," he once told me.

That was the thing about Bourdain: every time he spoke, the quotes tumbled out of his mouth fully formed. The next time I saw him it was with our own bad boy of the kitchen, Gordon Ramsay. I interviewed them together to ask about the tough love they showed to their staff and I have to say the New Yorker outgunned Ramsay at every turn.

"When you're chewing on your crew and utterly eviscerating them, it really does help if you do it well and with some style," Bourdain said in his deadpan 60-a-day baritone. "It's important for the recipient and the casual observer. You've got to get a bit creative."

He also loved to play up the street fighting that he felt inevitably came with the territory. "There have been a couple of interrogations that have been pretty brutal," he added in a cross between Tony Soprano and Liam Neeson. "The job needed to be done. I needed to break someone down right away. I happen to be very good at that."



Bourdain with Gordon Ramsay in New York, 2006

'VEGETARIANS ARE FRIGHTENED, ANGRY, BITTER PEOPLE,' BOURDAIN TOLD ME

Another time I emailed him for a piece I was writing about the growing fashion for vegetarianism, knowing he would be good for a counter quote to offset all the love and tolerance I was hearing.

"Vegetarians are frightened, angry, bitter people," he fired back within seconds. "It always stems from some traumatic event – 'My husband left me,' 'I got fired,' 'After my divorce I was looking for something different,' 'I dropped too much acid.' I often feel if it wasn't vegetarianism, it would be some other fundamentalist belief, and I hate orthodoxy of all kinds. If I find out someone is a vegetarian, it's like when you're dating and you go back to a girl's apartment and she goes to the bathroom, so you look through her record collection and you see the complete Billy Joel collection – I'm not there when she comes out of that bathroom."

So, a man of words, but also one of action and one who knew his onions, especially when it came to classic French cuisine. He developed his passion for gastronomy during childhood trips to France. After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America in 1978, he spent two decades battling in the high-pressure trenches of New York kitchens before finding his home in 1998 as executive chef at the French bistro Brasserie Les Halles in Manhattan, where he stayed for the next four years.

You can see for yourself his passion in these recipes taken from the book he wrote while there, *Les Halles Cookbook*, published in 2004. He talks the reader through everything from onion soup to veal tongue with madeira sauce, all delivered with his trademark knowledge, enthusiasm and underlying sense of menace.

FRENCH BISTRO CLASSICS

1. SOUPE AU PISTOU

Serves 6 (overleaf). Total time: 2hr, plus soaking time

A French vegetable soup not unlike minestrone. Pistou is similar to pesto.

- **225g white beans (pinto, great northern or Tarbais are all good)**
- **28ml olive oil**
- **2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced – as in *Goodfellas***
- **1 medium onion, diced small**
- **450g seeded, chopped, fresh, ripe tomato**
- **2 leeks, washed thoroughly and cut into 6mm slices**
- **2 small courgettes, diced small (remember to use only the outer parts of the courgettes and the yellow squash. Do not use the seed cavities; throw them out)**
- **2 small yellow squash, diced small**
- **1 fennel bulb, diced small**
- **900ml light chicken stock or broth**
- **1 bouquet garni**
- **75g elbow macaroni**

Pistou

- **1 bunch of fresh basil leaves, picked from stems, washed and dried**
- **6 garlic cloves**
- **120ml extra-virgin olive oil**
- **112g grated parmesan cheese**

Equipment

Large, heavy-bottomed pot, wooden spoon, ladle, mortar and pestle (or food processor, if you're criminally lazy)

First

The day before you make the soup, soak the beans in plenty of cold water for 24 hours. Since you have time, you might consider making your own chicken stock at this point. ➡

1

Next day

1. Put on some music. Drain and rinse the beans, then cook in either water or chicken stock until nearly done – meaning still a little hard in the middle. Do not cook the beans to mush, please. When ready, drain and rinse in cold water to arrest cooking. Put aside. You'll need them later. Do all your knife work, meaning the dicing, slicing and so on.
2. Now we are ready to begin the actual cooking. Right? You've got everything? Assemble your prepped ingredients in an organised fashion. You've got your "meez" together? Let's go...
3. In the large, heavy-bottomed pot, heat the olive oil. When the oil is hot, add the garlic and onion and sauté on low heat for a few moments to release the flavours. When the onion begins to clear and become translucent, add the rest of the vegetables and continue to sauté on low heat (sweating them) until slightly soft. Add the chicken stock or broth and the bouquet garni and bring to a quick boil on high heat, then immediately reduce the heat until you have a nice, gentle simmer. Add the elbow macaroni and continue simmering until it's nearly cooked through. Drop in the beans. Simmer, stirring occasionally, remembering to skim, skim, skim with the ladle to remove scum and foam.
4. While the soup is simmering, make the pistou. In the mortar and pestle, grind and pound the basil and garlic together until it becomes a sludge-like paste. With a fork, slowly incorporate the olive oil a little at a time. Fold in the parmesan at the end. Season with salt and pepper. You can, I suppose, cheat and use a food processor for this; plenty of, if not most, restaurants probably do. But that would be wrong.
5. After about 30 minutes, when the soup is ready (meaning the macaroni and the beans are cooked through but not mushy or overcooked, still maintaining their structural integrity), whisk in your pistou, salt and pepper to taste, and serve immediately.

2. FAUX-FILET AU BEURRE ROUGE

Serves 4. Total time: 1hr 15 min

- **110ml red wine**
- **1 shallot, finely chopped**
- **225g butter, softened**
- **1 sprig of flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped**
- **4 x 225g New York strip steaks (trimmed sirloin steaks)**
- **1 tsp oil**

Equipment

Small pot, mixing bowl, food processor, rubber spatula, clingfilm, brush, outdoor grill or grill pan

Make the red wine butter

1. In the small pot, combine the wine and shallot and bring to a boil over high heat. Cook until the wine has almost completely evaporated, taking care not to let the shallot burn. Transfer the mixture to the mixing bowl and let cool. In the food processor, add the softened butter, the shallot wine mixture, the parsley and salt and pepper to taste. Mix well.
2. Scrape the butter out of the food processor with the rubber spatula and place in the centre of a large piece of clingfilm. Gently form it into a 1-inch diameter log, shaping and squeezing and rolling it like you would roll a joint – or a nori roll. Don't worry – you can't mess it up. It's like Play-Doh: you can always go back and do it again. When you've got it right, twist the ends of the film tightly and refrigerate in the film until the butter is firm enough to slice.

Cook and serve the steaks

Take the steaks out of the refrigerator 10 minutes before cooking. Season the steaks with salt and pepper. Lightly brush them with the oil. Grill them, or cook them in the grill pan, to desired doneness. Put a slice of the red wine butter on each steak just before serving. ➡

PHOTOGRAPHS
Romas Foord

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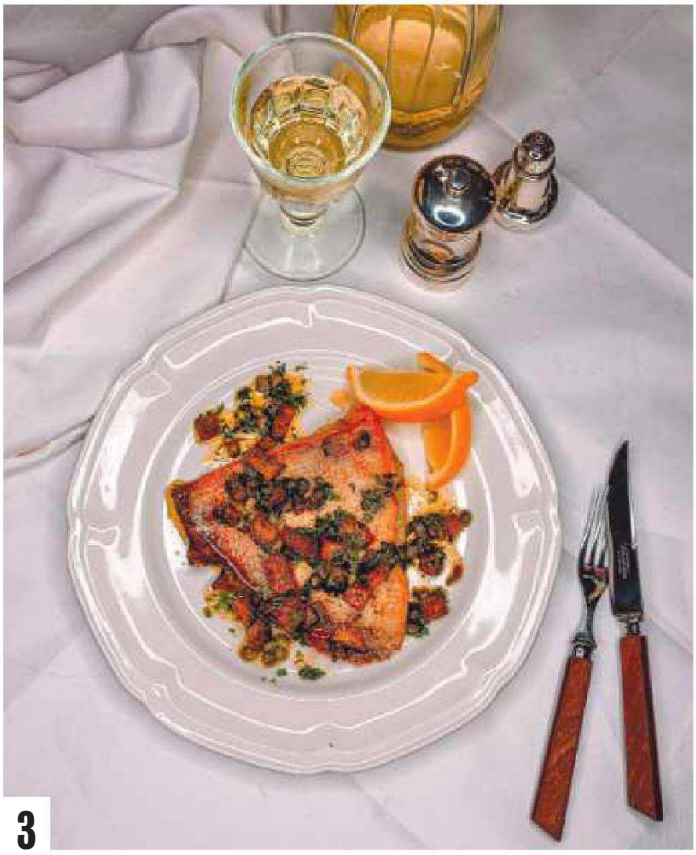

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3. SKATE GRENOBLOISE

Serves 2. Total time: 20 min

Long thought of as a "trash fish", skate is one of the truly great seafood items: tender, sweet, well textured – and cheap. Which is why many chefs are evangelical about running it as a special. Removing the thick, rubbery skin is tricky, so have your fishmonger do the work...

- **56g flour**
- **2 skate wings, skinned and boned out**
- **4 tbsp butter**
- **1 tbsp capers**
- **112g croutons**
- **1 lemon, juiced**
- **1 sprig of flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped**
- **1 lemon, peeled, seeded and segmented (optional)**

Equipment

Shallow bowl, sauté pan, fish turner or slotted spatula, serving platter

Prep

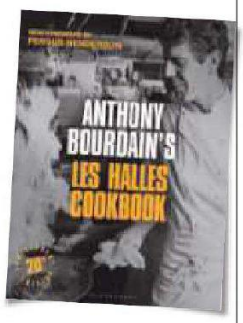
Put the flour in the shallow bowl and season it with salt and pepper. Dredge the fish in the flour and shake off the excess. Re-season the fish with salt and pepper.

Cook

In the sauté pan, heat 1 tbsp butter over medium-high heat. When the butter has foamed and subsided, add the fish and cook over high heat for 2 minutes. Add 1 more tbsp butter and turn the fish, cooking the other side for 2 minutes. Transfer the fish to the serving platter.

Finish

Discard the butter from the pan and then add the remaining 2 tbsp butter. Cook over high heat until it foams and subsides, then add the capers and croutons. Cook for 30 seconds, then add the lemon juice and parsley. (You can add the lemon segments at this point as well.) Remove from the heat and spoon the sauce over the fish.



© Anthony Bourdain, 2004. Recipes extracted from *Anthony Bourdain's Les Halles Cookbook: Strategies, Recipes, and Techniques of Classic Bistro Cooking*, published by Bloomsbury

4. MOULES NORMANDE

Serves 4. Total time: 1hr

- **112g slab bacon, cut into 1cm cubes**
- **4 tbsp butter**
- **1 shallot, thinly sliced**
- **6 small white mushrooms, thinly sliced**
- **Half an apple, cored, peeled and cut into small dice or chunks**
- **75ml good calvados**
- **225ml heavy cream**
- **2.7kg mussels, scrubbed and debearded (just before cooking)**

Equipment

Small pot, large pot with lid, wooden spoon

Cook

1. In the small pot, cook the bacon over medium-high heat until the meat is brown and the fat has been rendered, about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally to avoid sticking. Discard the fat and reserve the meat.
2. In the large pot, heat the butter until it foams. Add the shallot and cook until soft, about 3 minutes. Add the mushrooms and the apple and cook for 5 minutes, then stir in the calvados, scraping the bottom of the pot with the wooden spoon to dislodge any good brown stuff that might be clinging there. Stir in the cream and season with salt and pepper.
3. Once the mixture has come to a boil, add the mussels and cover. Cook for 10 minutes, or until all the mussels have opened. Shake. Cook for another minute. Shake again. Serve immediately.

5. TARTE ALSACIENNE

Serves 8. Total time: 2hr

- **3 tbsp butter**
- **75g sugar**
- **4 Golden Delicious apples, peeled, cored and cut into 1cm slices**
- **4 eggs**
- **110ml milk**
- **110ml heavy cream**
- **1 tsp vanilla extract**
- **1 x 25cm prebaked shortcrust pie case**

4

5

Equipment

2 baking sheets, 2 sheets of parchment paper, large mixing bowl, whisk, small saucepan

Prep the apples

Preheat the oven to 150C. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and grease the paper with 1 tbsp butter. Sprinkle the paper with 1 tbsp sugar and arrange the apples on the paper so that they do not overlap. Cut the remaining 2 tbsp butter into very small pieces and dot the apples with the butter. Sprinkle another 1 tbsp sugar over the apples and bake in the oven for about 40 minutes, or until the apples are soft but still holding their shape. Remove from the oven and allow to cool.

Prep the custard

In the mixing bowl, combine the eggs and the remaining sugar and whisk. In the small saucepan, combine the milk, cream and vanilla extract and bring it to a boil. Remove this mixture from the heat and slowly add it to the egg mixture, whisking constantly until it is all incorporated and the mixture is slightly thickened.

Assemble

Increase the oven heat to 180C. Line the other baking sheet with parchment paper and place the piecrust on it. Arrange the apple slices in a circular pattern in the crust. The apples should fill up the shell. Pull the oven rack out halfway and place the baking sheet and crust on the rack. Now, carefully pour the custard mixture into the piecrust, filling to the top but not overfilling it. Carefully push the rack back into the oven and bake until the custard is set, about 25 minutes. Allow to rest for 15 minutes before serving. ■

The doctor is standing over me when I come round from the anaesthetic, which, I have learnt, is never a good sign.

"I'm afraid it's worse than we thought," he says, glumly. Amputation? Have they operated on the wrong arm?

"We put a camera in the shoulder. On a scale of one to four," he says, "one being a healthy joint with perfect cartilage, four being no cartilage whatsoever, bone on bone [he pauses, like Stephen Mulhern on *Deal or No Deal*], you're a four."

Gulp.

"It might explain why you've been in so much pain all these years."

Once the word arthritis used to make me think of swollen-knuckled pensioners struggling to open a purse, but it turns out it can strike at any age. I am 31 and living with an arthritic shoulder, the legacy of repeated dislocations and failed surgeries.

The first time it happened was pathetic. I slipped in a shower at university, which, I was told, is an unexpectedly common injury among young men. And once a shoulder goes at that loose-ligamented age, it just keeps on going.

I was sent for routine surgery and recovered perfectly, but a few years later I smashed it up again playing a football match. A collision in the park resulted in a big bloke landing on my mended shoulder, ripping it out and cracking off the front of the socket. I was blue-lighted to A&E – and reconstructed once again.

But the pain has never disappeared. In fact, it has cost me more – and I don't say this lightly – financially, emotionally and physically, than testicular cancer five years prior. Cancer came with a plan: surgery, chemo, a hopeful endpoint. The shoulder offered nothing but uncertainty, and for a long time that uncertainty did more damage than the diagnosis ever had. An imagined sense of future, robbed. I would catch myself watching young dads lift their kids in the park, feel a twinge of pain and torture myself with the conviction that this would never be an option for me.

I have ping-ponged from surgeon to surgeon, physio to physio, each with a different theory pinpointing why it still hurts: tightness, stiffness, articular damage, nerve pain. I have had a parade of surgeries to try to fix a problem that, after all that, is unfixable. The joint is now something to be managed, rather than mended.

The pain will follow me for the rest of my life. And it turns out I'm not alone. Among the young, chronic pain is on the rise. The most recent national audit, the 2024 Health Survey for England, found a little over a quarter of adults hauling around some chronic ache, a figure that idles at about 12 per cent among the under-25s and climbs, decade by creaking decade, to 40 per cent of the over-75s.

My shoulder pain was worse than when I had cancer – both emotionally and physically

But the proportion of those young people whose pain is severe enough to disrupt work, relationships and daily life has risen sharply, from one in five people to one in three – the only age group to spike like that.

Nobody can agree why. Is this simply an age of unprecedented self-monitoring? Is it, as one surgeon put it to me, that we have gone "soft, so that any slight deviation from a pain-free existence is noticed and seized upon"? Or is there something peculiar to 21st-century life that is leaving a generation in more pain than previous ones?

Joshua Fein-Brown certainly thinks so. He is 34, an osteopath and pain therapist who splits his time between an NHS chronic pain service and his own private practice. He believes the rise can be explained by modern life, which "has drastically changed the way we use our bodies. We're mostly sedentary, doing repetitive tasks for long stretches of time." And when we do exercise, he says, we push ourselves hard at the gym or pound the pavement in spongy running shoes. This is the way the young and fit live now: at their computers all day but bookended by extreme exercise – marathons, Hyrox, CrossFit.

And underneath all this, he says, sit two deluded, but understandable, assumptions. "One," he argues, "is that there's a cure for every disease. And two, that we're built perfectly, that our bodies are designed for health. We're not. A lot of our biology is designed quite badly."

But this is a generation raised on optimisable health culture, the fitness app and the conviction that the body is a problem with a solution. Go to the GP, come away with a pill or a referral and the issue is fixed. You learn, without realising it, that pain is a temporary state to be corrected.

"Pain is the body's scream," Fein-Brown says. "And we've forgotten how to listen."

Fein-Brown has a name for what happens when you outsource that listening to a gadget: "Whoopitis", the affliction of the perpetually over-monitored, named after Whoop, the popular wearable fitness tracker. We have built a generation fluent in its own data but illiterate in its own sensation, and young people wonder why they hurt.

Dr Anthony Ordman, a pain consultant at the Royal Free Hospital, says it's not just our bodies that have gone quiet, but our lives around them. We socialise less, and the community that once sustained us has thinned to almost nothing. This matters, because the link between loneliness and pain is not conjecture.

Ordman sees this in who walks through his door. "There's a subgroup," he tells me, "people with social difficulties, who don't have a network of friends or family, who often have never worked. They seem to get long-term pain of all sorts."

There is a growing body of research into social connection as an analgesic. "Our propensity to live more behind a screen," Ordman says, "is severing those connections." The generation raised on phones is the loneliest yet and, it seems, among the most in pain.

So why, and how, do we feel pain at all? It's a more slippery question than it sounds, and to answer it I went to Professor Irene Tracey, vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford and a pain neuroscientist. She has spent 35 years putting people inside scanners to watch them hurt.

"Pain, at its most basic, is one of our oldest sensory and emotional ➡

OPENING SPREAD: HAIR AND MAKE-UP, CELINE NONON AT ARLINGTON ARTISTS USING ERBORIAN AND ORIBE HAIRCARE. JENNY WEARS JACKET AND SKIRT, MARKSANDSPENCER.COM. SHOES, FLORRIELONDON.COM. THIS SPREAD: TOM JACKSON, JACK LAWSON

‘IT’S LIKE BEING STABBED IN THE BACK WITH A KNIFE’

Sidonie Wilson, 33, on a sports injury 18 months ago that has confounded medical experts

I used to think I had a high pain threshold. Growing up with an older brother, I’d joke, had set me in good stead. Whenever someone sticks a needle in me now, I barely flinch. And yet pain is the very thing that has completely turned my life upside down for the past 18 months.

Last February, I injured my back playing netball. There wasn’t a dramatic pop or a heavy fall, but hours after an intense, competitive game, my back began to seize. Within weeks I was trapped in a debilitating, crippling agony that left me unable to walk. Scans soon revealed an L4-5 annular tear – a common disc injury that sports doctors assured me happens all the time to people my age (I’m 33) who spend the week hunched over a desk before throwing themselves into intense sport at the weekends.

But there has been nothing common about my experience. The pain has simply refused to leave. Instead, it kick-started a gruelling cycle of steroid injections, nerve blocks, physio and acupuncture. I’ve tried everything: cryotherapy, LED and infrared treatment, a mini hot water bottle strapped to my torso for months, and a Tens machine glued to my skin. I drowned myself in a heavy concoction of codeine, naproxen and diazepam, but nothing touches the sides.

According to the NHS, chronic pain is defined as anything lasting longer than three months. By bitter coincidence, that is also the exact point my medical insurance stopped paying for scans and appointments because my condition had transitioned from acute to chronic. Read: a lost cause.

Chronic pain slowly creeps into every corner of your daily routine until getting out of bed feels like an impossible mountain to climb. Desperate at the end of last year, I tried what the doctors called a “circuit-breaker”, taking a few months off work to let my back, and my nervous system, reset.

Nothing worked. I still spend uncomfortable nights lying flat on my back, scrolling through medical journals, desperately searching for an unexplored avenue. I have even found myself wishing a broken bone would show up on a scan, just to have some physical proof to validate what I feel. Instead, I have nothing to show for a relentless agony that feels like being stabbed in the lower back with a knife dipped in lighter fluid.

Being in constant pain is exhausting. Most days, my remaining energy is entirely consumed by the simple acts of getting dressed and making it to work. I force myself to keep pushing, whispering that it can’t be like this for ever. When my own resolve wavers, my partner steps in with the same encouraging words.

But over time, I can feel both of us growing weary. It’s stopped us talking about the future without the caveat of “when my back gets better”, and delayed planning for big life steps my other thirtysomething friends are doing.

Pain becomes an all-encompassing disease; you cannot think or talk about anything else with your partner, yet you are acutely aware that it is driving a wedge between you. It naturally suffocates intimacy. There is nothing less sexy than being asked if your back hurts when your partner tries to cuddle up to you in bed, or spending your days rating your suffering on a scale of one to ten.

Alongside the physical toll, there is the psychological weight of watching my body change without the ability to stop it. Where muscles used to stand proud, now all I see is an out-of-shape body. The mental battle is worse. Pain makes me want to retreat from the world.

People stop asking how you are. I am bored of talking about my back, so I certainly don’t expect anyone else to. On a good day, I might manage a gentle swim; most days, my activity is limited to the walk to work. I look back in disbelief at the days I used to pound the treadmills at Barry’s Bootcamp. I know I am lucky compared with some – I tell myself it could be worse – but that thought doesn’t make it any easier.

experiences," she tells me. "It's a teaching signal. You don't remember putting your finger in a candle for the first time, but you certainly don't do it again."

Pain is not, as we all assume, felt in the place that hurts. Our cells cannot speak to our awareness directly; they do not "feel" anything at all. They can only fire signals through the nervous system, a reaction to pressure or heat or the chemical broth of inflammation, sent to the brain, which reads the message and decides whether to manufacture the thing we call pain, and how much.

The proof is in how badly damage and pain match up. "There's a nonlinearity between injury and perception," Tracey says. "You can have half your leg chopped off and feel almost nothing, because the body blocks the signals so you can get away. And you can have no injury at all, just a fear or an expectation, and the circuits switch on and give you a full pain experience. Huge wound, no pain; no wound, agony – and everything in between."

Pain is less a thing that happens to you than a thing your brain does for you, mostly to keep you alive.

But the brain is never neutral. "It depends on your baseline, your mood, the chemicals your brain is bathed in," says Elisa Burato, an osteopath with a London clinic. "If you're a catastrophiser, or someone who's positive, that changes the whole equation of how bad the pain is."

Emotion, past trauma and life stresses all turn up the dial. Ordman has seen how emotional injuries and traumatic childhoods can predispose people to getting long-term pain conditions. On Tracey's scans an anxious, stressed brain lights up like Vegas, whereas a neutral one, with an equivalent pain input, looks more like Slough.

Burato also points to the nocebo effect, placebo's evil twin. She has watched practitioners reach for it with one eye on the invoice: "We need an x-ray, we need an MRI, you need to see me another three times," she says, miming the slow inflation of alarm. "That creates a feedback loop of anxiety, and this person, I can guarantee, their pain perception will go through the roof."

And this is the thing, Tracey says, that most people, and most of medicine, get wrong. "Chronic pain isn't just a symptom. The old model – that if you fix what started it, it goes away – hasn't worked. It's why so many people are in pain for 20, 30, 40 years. For a growing number of conditions, chronic pain is a disease in its own right."

Will Catchpole, a 31-year-old PE teacher and master's student from Norfolk, was 22, fit and playing rugby in Dubai when a knock to the head turned on him two days later. He awoke at four in the morning

'Chronic pain consumes your life. Unless you've had it, people are terribly judgmental about it'

screaming, not knowing where he was or who he was, so disorientated that the friend he was staying with came running in convinced he was watching someone die. Hospital ruled out a bleed on the brain, which should have been the good news. Instead there was nothing to point at, nothing to fix, just the reassurance that he'd improve in time.

He didn't. The pain never left. It sat behind his eyes and throbbed – not quite migraine, not quite anything with a name. Brain fog thickened until sentences slipped away mid-thought. Fatigue flattened entire days.

Catchpole had to give up graphic design, the job he'd trained for, because screens made everything worse. He moved back to Norwich, into his childhood bedroom, and stayed there, largely bed-bound, for the best part of two years.

Worse than any of that was the isolation. "You're drifting along in a separate universe," he says, "while everyone else is just living their life as normal." He hasn't been able to have a relationship since it happened.

Doctors were increasingly perplexed, fumbling for a diagnosis. Eventually, it was Catchpole who broke the cycle, not them. "I stopped seeing the doctors because they were making me worse, trying different medications. It felt like it was stifling my progress rather than helping it."

He read voraciously and looked for remedies: eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing therapy (EMDR); diet; breathwork; and eventually an app called Curable, built around the neuroscience of pain and founded by three people who'd had chronic pain themselves. A smattering of meditation, visualisation, journalling, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). "That was probably the point I made the most progress since the very start."

That led him to magnetic stimulation and a self-funded trip to a clinic in Australia. A scan there mapped his brain's connectivity against thousands of others who'd never had an injury. What it showed was a nervous system stuck on guard, unable to find its way back to its old baseline, bracing instead for the same thing to happen again. "It's guarding you," he says, "by giving you so much pain that you keep yourself in a safe place."

None of it made the pain go away. "It's still there all day, every day, eight years on," he says. What's changed is his relationship to it. And with that has come some relief from its most debilitating effects.

Today he works as a PE teacher, is completing a master's in psychology and works with the same Australian clinic to help other patients navigate recovery. "I've probably learnt more in the past eight years," he says. "I wouldn't wish it on anybody. But there's something about shared experience that you can't replicate."

Professor Simon Lambert is the specialist to whom I was referred when the other doctors had run out of explanations. He has done more than any other surgeon to broaden my understanding of why my pain has become chronic.

"None of us are aware of any of our joints until our attention is brought to it," he tells me. And when a joint gets damaged, the brain – ultimately a prediction machine – scrambles to account for the change, and usually gets it right. But when the pain persists, the prediction itself curdles. The brain starts to expect the pain, to brace for it, to find it, whether or not it is still there. And in doing so, the neural pathways become overly sensitised, reinforced like a bottom indenting a sofa over many years.

One of the reasons my shoulder was so problematic, I came to realise, is that it was loaded with symbolic meaning. It was while I was recovering from reinjuring it in late 2020 that I was diagnosed with testicular cancer. After six months of chemo, and another six months to get over the worst of the side-effects, I was given the all-clear and told to get on with my life. But the shoulder refused to get better.

It became my focus, a painful reminder of vulnerability. I would lie in bed at night looking for the pain, yanking my shoulder around to the ends of its limited range of motion, as if to point out to myself that, yep, the pain is still there.

All I wanted to do was return to normal, to leave the world of pain and consulting rooms behind me. But the shoulder, the unending dull ache of pain and mystery as to its cause, held me back. I kept looking for a fix that would not come.

When I speak to Jenny Tong, a 29-year-old athlete, she tells me she hunted the same fix for the better part of a decade, and has travelled further into the dark than I ever did.

Jenny was not always an athlete. At 16 she was a Brit School kid with a fake ID, breezing into nightclubs on the weekends. Sport was the last thing on her mind. Then she got to university, wanting, she says, to "reconnect with my body". She wandered into a sports fair, spotted the weightlifting stall, picked up a barbell and reorganised her life around it.

Within months, her body began to fall apart. The injury list is long: knee, back, hip, an ACL that has never been repaired.

TIM JOBLING: WILL WEARS TOP AND SHIRT, MARKSANDSPENCER.COM. JENNY WEARS DRESS, NOBODYSCHILD.COM. SHOES, MARKSANDSPENCER.COM

Jenny Tong and Will Catchpole

The obvious question is why she kept going. "I fell in love with the person I became because of sport," she says. "I met a version of myself I never knew existed." So she took the necessary steps to recover – albeit temporarily – and carried on.

What frightened Tong most, when her back went one day in the gym, was not her athletic career. "My first thought was not, 'Will I lift again?' but, 'What if I can't run in the park with my imaginary future dog? Or pick up my imaginary future children without pain?' The future was what concerned me most. You spend years being told you're capable. And you believe it. Chronic pain changes your relationship not just with your body but with yourself."

Today she is never not in pain. "I don't know what it feels like to go an hour without pain somewhere in my body, even at rest." Week in, week out she visits osteopaths and physios. "Chronic pain isn't just pain," she says. "It's admin. And it's expensive."

What, then, can be done when medicine isn't the answer?

If pain is built by the brain, predicted by the brain, amplified and locked in by the brain, then understanding mindset and changing your attitude can have measurable effects.

Professor Tracey is emphatic on this. She has the scans to back it. "The science shows pain is in your head," she says. "You've got these extraordinary systems that can make it worse or better. If you don't accept that, you're missing half the trick. And frankly these mechanisms are more powerful than any drug."

Patients hate being told this, she says, because they hear it as an accusation that they are making it up. But the great gift of brain imaging is that it answers the accusation. Tracey's scans can prove to patients that a positive mindset is a way to tap into the body's natural medicine cabinet. Accepting the pain, changing your attitude towards it, doing the things you love – "These fire the same circuitry as a placebo, by releasing the body's painkillers. We call it top-down modulation."

Almost everybody, however, first goes looking for the cure. Ordman watches them arrive in his clinic having already toured half the profession. He calls them the doctor-shoppers, the ones who will spend their lives on "an eternal search for a fix that isn't coming".

Instead, he draws a distinction between pain and suffering. The pain is the signal. The suffering is the story you wrap around it, the future you imagine. He can do something about the pain, with injections and exercise and time, but only to a point.

The rest of the work is for the patient to do. "The best physios," he says, "are those who also do psychology without telling anybody."

Fein-Brown did the psychology on me. He spent the first session understanding why the pain held so much emotional resonance. He got me to stop hunting for it, to find the ranges of movement that did not hurt. He even got me to write a letter to the pain, which I would once have mocked but ended up being cathartic.

"When you are always caught up in fixing yourself, you make it worse," Fein-Brown says. "When you shift your focus away from fixing things, things get better."

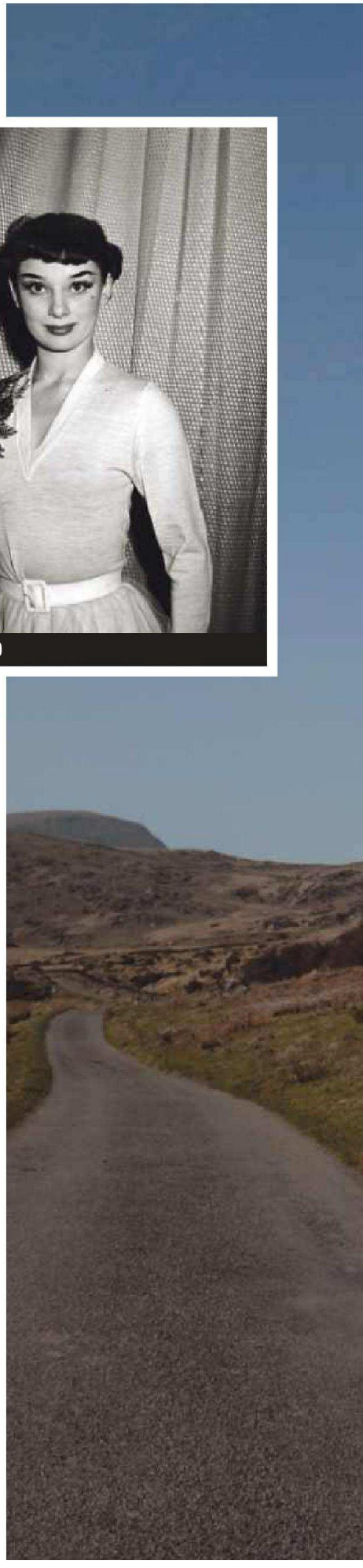
It is hard to accept physical limitations when you're young. But once I reframed the injury, the "pain" became less intense. If you learn not to feed it with oxygen, the flames of pain burn less fiercely.

It does still make me feel weaker and less "powerful" than before. I've got a certain Quasimodo-like imbalance to my torso. But I have stopped complaining about it. Not least because there's a finite amount of sympathy for people with any long-term soreness.

Near the end of my chat with Tracey, she says, "People need to understand. Pain consumes your life, your identity, your ability to move on and enjoy things. And unless you've had it, we're terribly judgmental about other people's pain. The one thing I'd want people to know is that it's hard, it's complex, it's all-consuming, and we should be kinder about it." ■

Micky Burn with Unity Mitford at a Nuremberg rally in 1935

Audrey Hepburn in 1950



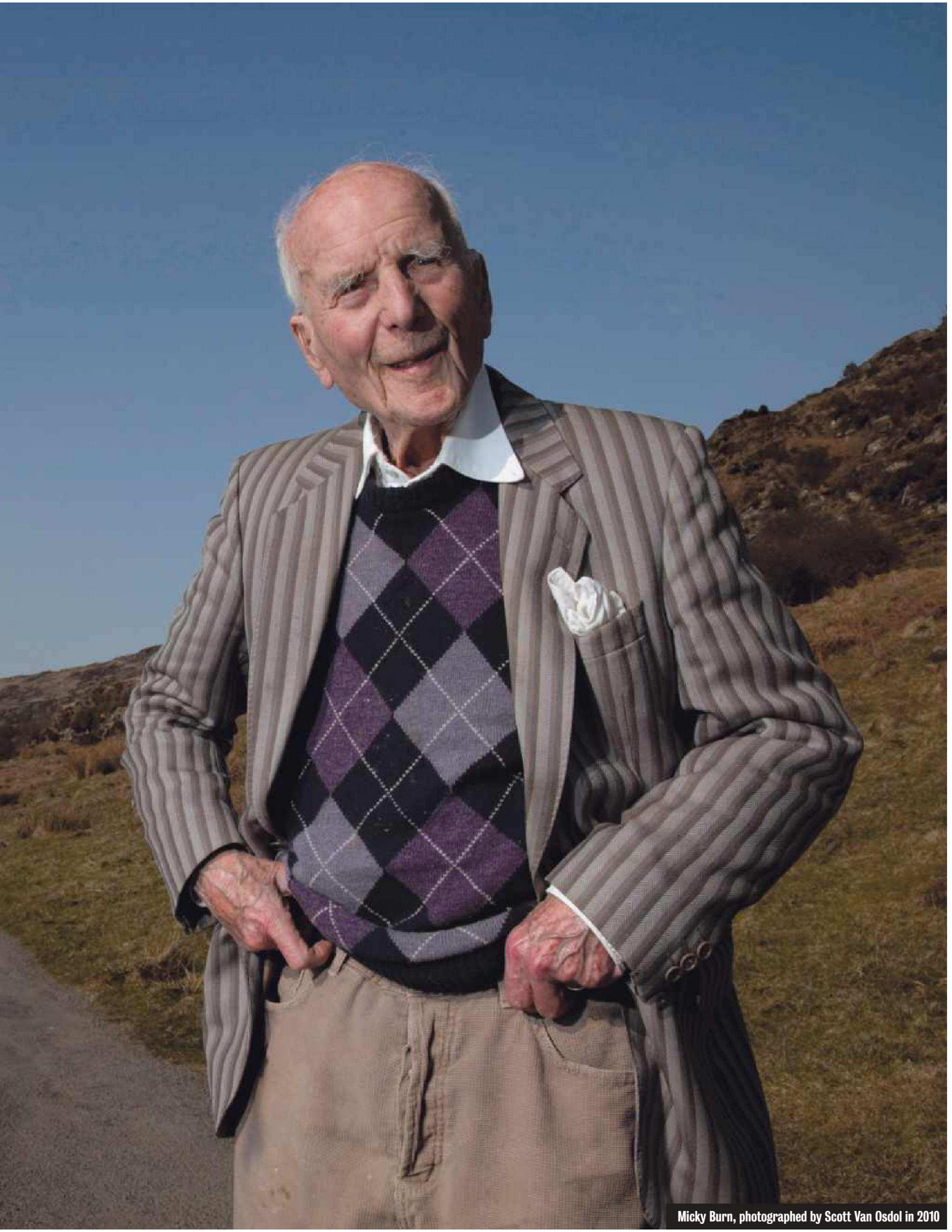
In 1936 Micky Burn joined The Times, reporting from Austria, Yugoslavia and Hungary. He was a flamboyant bisexual, a Nazi sympathiser who became a committed communist, a war hero and Colditz prisoner of war. He saved Audrey Hepburn's life and was Guy Burgess's lover.

Could he also have been a spy?

SEX, LIES AND SECRETS

THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF MICKY BURN

By Ben Macintyre



Micky Burn, photographed by Scott Van Osdol in 2010

Last week I was sent a four-page, unpublished document written four decades ago by Micky Burn, one of the strangest and most interesting journalists to work at The Times.

Guy Burgess, right, with journalist Tom Driberg in Moscow, 1956

Burn joined this newspaper in 1936 and went on to become its correspondent in Austria, Yugoslavia and Hungary after the war. A skilled reporter and writer, he was also flamboyantly bisexual, a novelist, playwright and poet, a decorated war hero and Colditz prisoner of war, a Nazi sympathiser who became a committed communist. He probably saved the life of the young Audrey Hepburn and ended up as a failed mussel farmer in Wales.

In the document, written in 1987, Burn describes his long and tempestuous love affair with Guy Burgess, the diplomat, KGB double agent and member of the so-called Cambridge Five spy ring. A remarkable depiction of gay life in the Thirties, Burn's account also reveals that the Soviet intelligence services deliberately set out to recruit journalists on this newspaper as spies.

"The Times had a very high priority among possible agents for the Russians, even higher than the Foreign Office," Burn wrote.

The KGB planted communist spies throughout the British establishment: three of the Cambridge Five were diplomats, one an MI6 officer, and one a distinguished art historian and surveyor of the King's/Queen's pictures. But its primary target, according to Burn, was The Times. Moscow wanted its agents planted inside Britain's undisputed "paper of record". And it succeeded.

Kim Philby, perhaps the most notorious double agent in history, joined The Times in 1937 on the instructions of his Soviet handler, and went on to cover the Spanish Civil War and the retreat from Dunkirk. Harry Smollett, another KGB recruit, was the paper's correspondent in postwar Vienna. David Holden, the Times and Sunday Times journalist mysteriously murdered in Cairo in 1977, may have been a double agent working for the KGB, according to a new book. The Australian-born journalist Wilfred Burchett, who reported on eastern Europe for The Times during the postwar period, was later identified as a KGB informant.

Burgess himself wangled his way onto The Times before the war with a trial stint as a sub-editor on the Home News desk. Disruptive, witty, untidy, malodorous and usually drunk, Burgess lasted exactly 26 days as a Times man before being fired for incompetence.

As a communist and veteran Times reporter, Burn was an obvious target for the KGB. In his note, Burn claims that Burgess never overtly tried to recruit him as a spy, yet he was clearly sizing up his lover as a possible addition to the Cambridge spy ring and the roster of KGB agents on the newspaper. Burn notes that, "Now and then in a mysterious way he mentioned secret service. 'Would one be prepared to spy in Stockholm as well as Paris...?'" He also extravagantly praised Burn's writing, which may have indicated "he had me in mind as recruit".

Burgess first met Burn at a May Ball in Cambridge in 1933 and promptly seduced him. A year and a half older, Burgess was in his final year at Trinity College, where he had come to know Philby and Anthony Blunt. All three were secret communists who would be recruited by Soviet intelligence two years later.

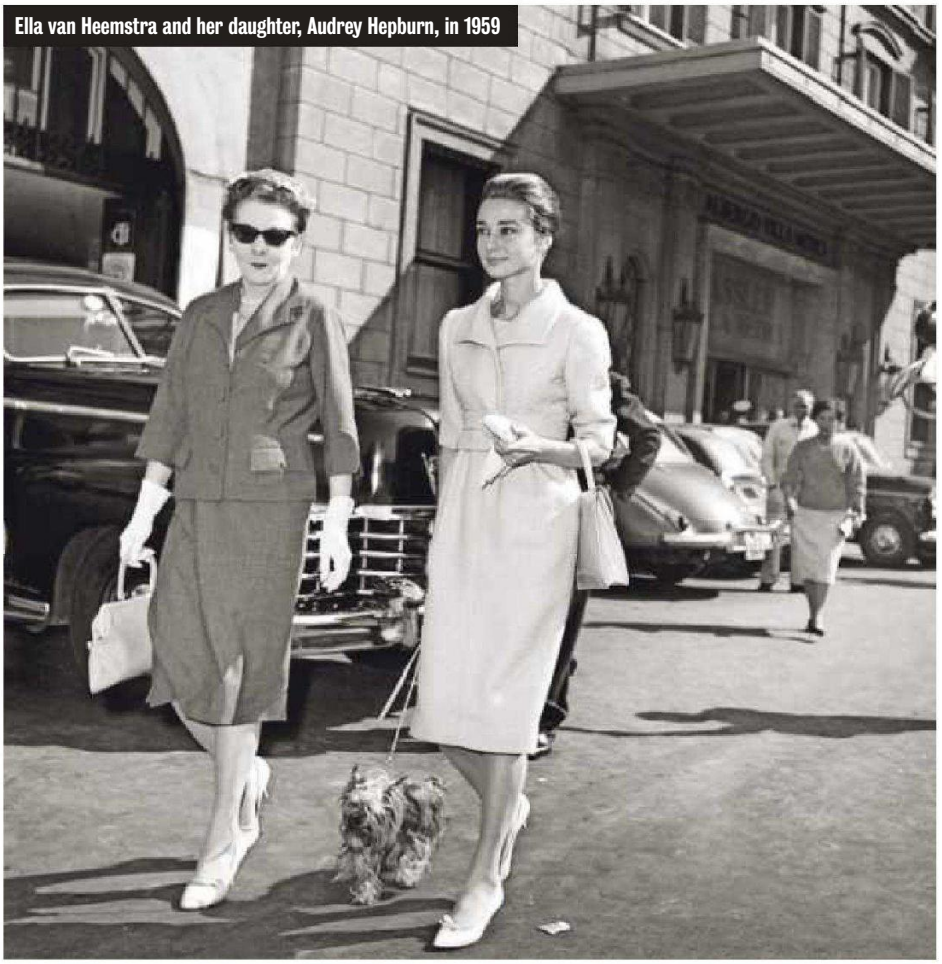
Burn was dazzled by Burgess. "He was very brilliant, funny and good company," he writes in his account of their relationship. "He came across and invited me back to his room. I spent most of the night with him and then climbed out to rejoin the girls who had invited me to Cambridge." So began a love affair that would continue, on and off, until Burgess defected to Russia with fellow spy Donald Maclean in 1951.

When he met Burgess, Burn had just been sent down from Oxford after one year for doing no work at all. (He did find time to ghost the autobiography of the motor-racing champion Tim Birkin.) The son of the King's solicitor, Burn had been raised in a grace and favour house opposite Buckingham Palace. He was louche, handsome, naive and, by his own account,

'I am now living in a castle, as the best people do,' he wrote to his parents from Colditz

Burn being captured by German troops, and making a secret V for victory sign

PREVIOUS SPREAD: TOM DIXON/TIMES NEWSPAPERS. THIS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES



Ella van Heemstra and her daughter, Audrey Hepburn, in 1959

Hitler inscribed a copy of Mein Kampf for him. Burn treasured it before leaving it in a taxi

extremely spoilt: "I only had to lift a finger, and it was all laid on." When Burn's father discovered his homosexuality, Burn was given Benzedrine injections by George V's doctor, which made him hyperactive, but not heterosexual.

The year he met Burgess, Burn travelled to Bayreuth to soak up Wagner's music and fell under the spell of Nazism. "My mix of ignorance, blindness and semi-criminal benevolence turned me into a dupe," he later wrote. The British fascist Unity Mitford introduced him to Hitler, who inscribed a copy of *Mein Kampf* for the young Englishman. Burn treasured this nasty memento for one day, before getting drunk and leaving it in a taxi.

At a Nuremberg rally, Burn described the "great lights in the sky, moving music, the rhetoric, the presentation, timing, performance, soundtrack, exultation and climax". Sitting alongside him was another Nazi enthusiast, the Dutch aristocrat Baroness Ella van Heemstra, with whom he started an affair.

Back in Britain, Burn hurtled in the opposite ideological direction, embracing the politics of the far left after concluding that "what Hitler was offering me as soul-saving was shit".

Burgess played a key role in converting Burn to Marxism-Leninism. "He made no secret of his communism at that time and taught me a lot about it," Burn writes.

Burn joined The Times on the Imperial and Foreign News desk, and worked closely with the editor, Geoffrey Dawson, during the abdication crisis of 1936.

Through Burgess, Burn was introduced to a hard-living, frequently bisexual upper-class set and met numerous literary celebrities. He offended EM Forster (and amused Burgess) by telling the famous author that he thought Somerset Maugham "the greatest living novelist". In Cambridge, he recalls, "We climbed a wall to stare at AE Housman reading in [his] garden." The poet did not spot them.

"Guy was brazen about his homosexuality and seemed to think pretty much everyone great in history had been gay either openly or undercover... He liked to show me off to his gay friends." In *An Englishman Abroad*, Alan Bennett described Burgess as a "rumpled Etonian mud lark".

Burgess was wildly promiscuous, but his feelings for Burn went deeper. The scientist and MI5 officer Victor Rothschild told Burn that Burgess was in love with him. "I suppose he was, as far as he was capable of it... I was not in love with him," Burn writes in his account of their relationship.

It was during this time that Burn met Kim Philby, a glamorous war correspondent and rising star on The Times. Philby had joined the paper on the orders of his KGB handler, Arnold Deutsch, a charismatic Czech intellectual. "Once you're inside, you'll look around and decide which way to go."

Burgess also introduced Burn to Anthony Blunt and Donald Maclean, another diplomat. By this time Burgess, Philby, Blunt and Maclean were all secretly spying for the Soviets. Burn himself might have been drawn into the spy ring, had the war not intervened.

On the outside, Burn was a dilettante, a social butterfly who hopped from bed to bed and idea to idea without pausing to think very deeply. But he also possessed extraordinary reserves of raw courage.

His war record reads like an account in the Boy's Own Paper. Burn immediately joined the Special Service Brigade, a volunteer unit of crack commandos, and took part in the defence of Norway following the German invasion of 1940, armed only with "a Jane Austen and a little ammunition".

"You are now a war hero," Burgess teased him when he came home. "You look beautiful in your uniform." Burgess himself had no intention of going to war. "He wouldn't have lasted long in any regiment," Burn writes.

In March 1942, Burn played a leading role in Operation Chariot, an amphibious attack on the dock at St Nazaire used by the Nazi fleet. In one of the most daring operations of the war, Captain Burn led his unit of 28 commandos on a mission to destroy the port's gun emplacements while a destroyer, disguised as a German ship and laden with high explosives, rammed the dock. Half Burn's troops were killed but he fought his way ashore and was finally captured with bullet and shrapnel wounds to his arm, thigh and back. He was later awarded the Military Cross. The Germans published a propaganda photograph of Burn being led away at gunpoint by German sailors with his hands in the air: the photographer failed to notice that Burn's left hand was surreptitiously raised in the V for victory sign. He was locked up in Colditz with hundreds of captured Allied officers.

"I am now living in a castle, as most of the best people do at this time of year," Burn wrote to his parents. There he established himself as the prison's resident philosopher, "a born optimist, and one ➡

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of the few men in Colditz who never got depressed". He also contrived to have sex with other men, an aspect of Colditz life rigorously suppressed in every subsequent account, even though "anything of that sort" was a challenge since it was "very difficult to find sufficient privacy to make it enjoyable". With his journalist shorthand, he took down the nightly BBC broadcasts on the secret radio concealed in the attic, which were read out to the prisoners. In captivity he studied for an Oxford diploma in social sciences, learnt Russian and gave lectures on Marxism. These did not go down well with fellow prisoner Douglas Bader, the legless flying ace and a man of violent prejudices. Burn's flamboyance and left-wing views made him "a dangerous menace", according to Bader.

In October 1945, following his release from Colditz, Burn received a letter from his former lover Ella van Heemstra. Like him, she had abandoned her earlier flirtation with fascism and had suffered greatly under Nazi occupation. Van Heemstra's daughter, known as "Edda", had dreams of becoming a dancer, but was suffering from jaundice, anaemia and an infection caused by malnutrition. Van Heemstra asked Burn if he could obtain penicillin, a new wonder drug that could save her daughter's life. Burn sent thousands of cigarettes, which Van Heemstra sold on the black market to buy the medicine. The girl recovered and went on to become Audrey Hepburn.

Back in London after the war, Burn found Burgess much reduced, dishevelled and almost permanently drunk. The strain of his wild lifestyle and the stress of his espionage was taking a toll. "He was drinking a lot and getting rather blowsy," Burn notes.

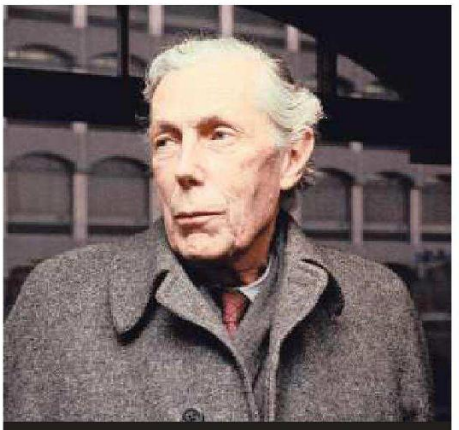
Burn had returned convinced he was fully homosexual but then swiftly fell in love with a woman, Mary Booker, to whom he was married for the next three decades. He introduced her to Burgess: "I was told you had married the most beautiful woman in London, and it's true," said Burgess, ever the charmer.

It was Burn's continued homosexuality (apparently conducted with his wife's knowledge) that led to his estrangement from Burgess.

"I now and then used to pick up boys round about Piccadilly... Not very many, but now and then," he writes. One day, Burn read in the News of the World that a male brothel had been raided and several men arrested for homosexual offences. Fearing his name might appear on some list, he went to Scotland Yard and asked to speak to the inspector in charge of the case.

"I told him that I had a problem. I gave my name and address at Buckingham Gate. I hoped he would advise and help. He was amazed. All he said was that he was sure I would marry and get over it."

SHUTTERSTOCK



The double agent Anthony Blunt in 1979

When he related the story to Burgess, the KGB spy was visibly alarmed. "He then pulled himself together and said, 'Micky, that was very objective of you.'"

Burgess now apparently saw Burn as a security risk. "I suppose, as a spy, it was not at all a good thing for him to associate so closely, let alone be in love with, someone who took their problems to the police... After that, his interest in me dwindled."

Nonetheless, Burgess still tried to seduce him from time to time. "You don't understand, I'm married," Burn told him.

"Don't be so pompous," Burgess said.

Burn campaigned for the Communist Party but later disavowed Marxism after reporting on the reality of communist rule as the Times correspondent in eastern Europe.

By 1951, Burgess was second secretary at the British Embassy in Washington but facing dismissal due to his drinking and increasingly erratic behaviour. Kim Philby was also in Washington, having risen to the post of MI6 station chief.

Philby discovered that the Americans had cracked some of the KGB's wartime radio codes and the authorities were closing in on Maclean. Philby told Burgess, by now his lodger, to return to London and warn Maclean that he may have to flee.

In October, back in London, Burgess called Burn from a party, very drunk. "I love you," he slurred.

Burn never saw him again. Days later, Burgess and Maclean climbed onto a boat sailing for the French port of St Malo and then fled to Russia, never to return.

Burn was badly shaken by the defection of his former lover. "People suffered a good deal afterwards for their association with him," he writes. "I never did. Somehow I had kept clear and anyhow I soon left The Times and had no importance."

Burn turned to fiction. His Colditz novel, *Yes, Farewell*, was a disguised socialist manifesto pronouncing the death of the old class structure. This was followed by a torrent of books, plays and poems of variable quality. His mother pressed his poetry on various literary luminaries: JB Priestley thought Burn's verses "very promising", but TS Eliot considered his poetry "immature, and often awkward". His father was blunter: "I hate poetry unless it rhymes."

Burn moved to Porthmadog Harbour, where he established a mussel-farming cooperative run on socialist principles. Predictably, it was a financial failure.

He wrote about his affair with Burgess in a 2003 article in The Times headlined "Guy Burgess: The Spy who Loved Me". Burn recalled his former lover's air of "sham innocence, as if he had just run away after ringing some important person's doorbell." Most of the details in his four-page note were omitted from the article, perhaps, as Burgess's biographers Stewart Purvis and Jeff Hulbert write, because he "judged that readers of The Times might not be quite ready for some of the forensics".

A man of intensely short-lived passions and limited patience, Burn was determined to taste everything in life, but stuck to little. A Nazi sympathiser turned communist turned Catholic, he also renounced that religious faith over its stance on homosexuality. A war hero, happily married bisexual, mussel-breeder, poet and journalist who later abandoned facts in favour of fiction. Burn was never bored and remained an optimist to his dying day, in 2010, at the age of 97.

Burgess was, in some ways, the opposite. At a young age, he embraced secret communism and, despite the chaos of his life, he never abandoned it.

In another rare element of consistency, Burn may have been the love of Burgess's life. The four-page document sent to me by his nephew certainly gives that impression – a love story from beyond the grave. But it also leaves a lingering mystery. Burn may have tried everything once, but he never put his hand to espionage. As a friend of Burgess and acquaintance of the other Cambridge spies, a convinced secret communist and a highly suggestible man of adventure, Burn was ripe for recruitment. Burgess slept with Burn, taught him about communism and introduced him to a world packed with spies. Yet he never recruited him.

That, at least, is what Burn claims. ■

Just before he fled to Russia, Burgess called Burn from a party. 'I love you,' he slurred

The college lecturer from Wigan who became a millionaire fashion mogul

Victoria Magrath started a style blog as a hobby while finishing her PhD. What began as a side gig soon turned into a career. Now she has a make-up line, an army of followers who hang on her every recommendation and a house built on the profits (gold bath included)

By Harriet Walker

Victoria Magrath, 37, photographed at home in Milton Keynes by Tim Jobling

Venice Film Festival, 2023

Chelsea Flower Show, 2025

In Rome in 2019

In London, 2021

London Fashion Week, 2017

One of Victoria Magrath's first paid partnerships in 2013 – as what had only just become known as an "influencer" – was to talk about a new brand of chocolate-flavoured oat milk in a short clip on YouTube.

"It was delicious and it sounded easy; I thought, why not?" the Wigan native says. "Brand deals weren't even a thing back then. I think I got £5,000 – crazy money. From there it just boomed."

These days at least one of the 37-year-old's 1.2 million Instagram followers, 1 million YouTube subscribers, 828,000 TikTok fans, 145,000 Pinteresters and 73,000 Facebook followers shops every minute from her recommendations page on the affiliate platform LTK, where she has a further 54,000 followers and earns commission. On average they spend £100 per hour. Her make-up line, Byfrow, which launched last November, took more than 1,000 orders on its first day.

If you haven't heard of Victoria Magrath, you are not alone. She is often called by the name of her original blog, Inthefrow ("frow" is fashion industry shorthand for front row), which she launched in 2012, aged 23. "My best mate still calls me Frowy," she says.

These days Magrath is known online simply as @Victoria; having a first-name-only handle is the influencer equivalent of mononymous pop stars such as Madonna or Prince. Yet it isn't luck that's brought her here. When she started the blog, Magrath decided to trademark the word "frow" globally, "just in case". At the time, she was researching a consumer behaviour PhD that seemed to point to one thing: the way we shopped was about to change for ever.

"This was before shopping on your mobile was even a thought process," she says. "A few brands had websites but there were no apps."

By 24, Magrath was a lecturer at the University of Manchester, in the same fashion retail department where she'd been an undergraduate. Her dream had been to work at the ecommerce site Net-a-Porter; she even bought a pair of Louboutin heels to wear there with her first lecturing pay cheque. Yet her research awakened her to a parallel universe in which Victoria Magrath might be not just a fashion enthusiast but an editor, model, marketing team and chief executive combined. After watching a YouTube make-up tutorial, she started recording her own.

"Every morning I'd look at how many followers I had and there'd be 10 or 20 new ones. Seeing the page views was so exhilarating."

Within a year Magrath was waking at 6am to finish writing her lectures. After office hours she'd write blog posts, then start composing the next set of lectures.

"I lived with my best friend and she was so supportive, but eventually something had to give. I wasn't sleeping. I'd hit the point where I made more money from the blog than from lecturing. So I risked it."

That same friend has now been her PA for 13 years, despite pronouncing those early YouTube videos "cringe". The boyfriend Magrath hardly saw because she was working too hard is now her husband; they met at 16, then again at 21 and married in 2019 in a Provençal château over a weekend that featured five bridal looks and was documented on her own social feeds as well as Harper's Bazaar. Alex Magrath (he took her name) now regularly stars in his wife's video clips. He still takes all her pictures and edits all her videos, just as he did in the years before anyone had come up with the phrase "Instagram boyfriend" for the men behind the women whose faces make the money.

'EVERY MORNING I'D LOOK AT HOW MANY MORE FOLLOWERS I HAD. IT WAS SO EXHILARATING'

And there is a lot of it. Electric gates, sports car, designer handbags: her life looks like a footballer's. After 13 years working with L'Oréal, Victoria Beckham and Dior rather than oat milk brands, Magrath's net worth is £1.2 million, the internet estimates. Does that sound about right to her?

"I've never really spoken about it," she says. "But yeah, I have made over a million. So I suppose I'm a millionaire. I didn't come from money. I've always worked hard to pay my way."

Magrath's father was a conveyancer and her mother became a study-support worker at the local college when she and her brother went to secondary school. As a teenager attending C of E Deanery High School in Wigan, Magrath was "certainly not a popular kid". She was also a potwash at a local restaurant, working up to waitress and eventually assistant chef.

"I don't like to refer to myself as an influencer," she says. "It makes what I do feel transactional, and I didn't start that way. It was a hobby I was obsessed with."

Magrath prefers the term "content creator", and her well-appointed home (an extensive renovation in Buckinghamshire that was covered on all platforms) suggests she still is. Beauty products are laid out for the perfect "shelfie"; the walk-in closet of dreams makes for an ideal backdrop. In the hallway a compact vlogging camera complete with fluffy mic sits as expectantly as her sausage dog. She posts almost every day, recently about trying to move full-time to Cornwall.

"I literally talk to the camera as if it's a friend," she says, laughing. "I didn't swear online for 12 years; now I do. I think people are craving the real and unfiltered – less perfection, less consumerism."

But other people consuming is the central plank of her business model. Magrath is part of an influencer marketing

PREVIOUS SPREAD: HAIR, CHRISTOPHER LONG. MAKE-UP: GABRIELLA FLOYD MAKEUP USING BYFROW. THIS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES

Cannes Film Festival, 2017

At the Bafta awards this year

London Fashion Week, 2019

With her husband, Alex, in Venice in 2021

‘I’D HIT THE POINT WHERE I MADE MORE MONEY FROM THE BLOG THAN FROM LECTURING. SO I RISKED IT’

industry valued at $34.1 billion (£25 billion) by the Digital Marketing Institute, up from $32.55 billion last year. The wider “creator economy”, of which she is at the heart, is projected by Goldman Sachs to reach $500 billion by 2027. For every $1 spent on influencer marketing, brands make an average of $5.78.

That’s why Magrath got her first £5,000 all those years ago: in an economy whose favourite buzzword is “authenticity”, likeable people are a valuable commodity. From the moment she answers the door of her home – flanked by hydrangeas in planters decorated with Manchester bees – and draws me in for a hug, Magrath is impossible to dislike.

“I have a warmth that I can’t get rid of,” she says, laughing. “There have been times when I’ve gone for fittings with big fashion brands and they’d be like, who’s this chatty person with a smile on her face? But by the end their whole demeanour would change.”

Does her northern accent have something to do with it?

“For a long time I thought it was holding me back. I was the only northerner in the room; I worried people wouldn’t take me seriously. But I think Andy Burnham is going to cut through because of it too. If you’re speaking in a relatable way, it’s a goldmine.”

“Relatable” is another buzzword of our age. You cannot be liked if you are not relatable – and on social media, likes are what matter if you want to make money.

“The public loves and trusts Victoria,” says Amber Venz Box, the American co-founder of the LTK shopping platform, which hosts Magrath and is valued at $2 billion. The two first met at London Fashion Week a decade ago.

When Magrath launched her cosmetics brand, Byfrow, she turned down stockist offers from four major retailers (“ones you’ve heard of”) so she could do it her own way.

Late last month she released a £30 SPF50 Hue Glazing Balm (sheer blush, to you and me) for lips and cheeks. Byfrow also launched with £19 lip liner pencils, which Magrath credits with killing off the filler injections she used to have.

“I realised after a few years I didn’t like how my lips looked with them,” she says, shrugging. “Then I learnt to overline my lips and they looked better.”

Magrath has been an internet personality for so long, her previous incarnations are a googleable evolution of man. For example, she was always doll-like, despite being 5ft 7in, but she now looks like someone who has a reformer Pilates bed in her garage (seen it). Even without make-up on as we chat, she has that constantly-on-camera polish. In the early days she had purple hair, then platinum and classic blonde. Now she is a strawberry blonde and fans regularly book in with her hairdresser to request whatever she has had done. But they haven’t always been complimentary.

“I’ve seen the most awful threats you can imagine,” she says. “Social media is like the Wild West – there’s no policing, no boundaries. People will say the worst things and they’re becoming more cruel. There’s so much less warmth.”

There has certainly been a backlash against Instagram’s wealthy gloss vibes during a cost-of-living crisis (not relatable). As many people tighten their belts, last month a survey found that 74 per cent of us don’t trust influencer reviews. Last year The Retail Bulletin reported the number of purchases driven by influencers was down from 54 per cent in 2023 to 50 per cent in 2025, while 65 per cent of people said they were more likely to trust word of mouth. Yet what is influencing if not word of mouth monetised on a grand scale?

“Even me, most of the things I buy, it’s because I’ve seen them on an influencer. But we content creators are absolutely at fault for influencing excess,” Magrath says. “I have all these beautiful bags and shoes – everything I ever wanted – and I don’t need it all.”

Sitting on her cream sofas surrounded by Dior blankets and Loewe candles that have been either gifted because of or paid for by her giant online presence, this isn’t what I was expecting to hear. Then again, Magrath’s career first kicked off when she took a punt on a new direction. What is her prediction for consumer behaviour this time round?

“There’s so much fake AI stuff now; people want to get away from their phones,” she says. “I’ve made peace with making less content, less commission. Now, it’s about having experiences you’ll remember rather than another pair of jeans you won’t.”

On the way out, I ask where her white barrel-leg pair with red-stitched pockets are from. I can’t help it. ■

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Pout! LIGHTWEIGHT MAKE-UP FOR SUMMER

By Nadine Baggott

Minimum effort, maximum results is my beauty motto and never more so than in summer, when there are always better things to do than a full face of opaque make-up. Here's how, with skincare/make-up hybrids that go on sheer but have staying power.

1 THE CULT BB CREAM

Missha M Perfect Cover Serum BB Cream *(£12.90, in eight shades; boots.com)*

The cult Korean BB cream, a bestseller for more than 20 years in Seoul, has finally landed at Boots, and it's good. Essentially it is skincare with pigments, so the first experience is a serum or superlight lotion that just happens to blur pores and fine lines, soften redness or pigmentation with ease. I will be brutal and say it needs many more shades but they will come if it's a success over here, so get down to Boots and try to find a skin-matching shade. It's pretty sheer, so it is slightly more forgiving than a full coverage base.

2 THE LIQUID LIGHT BRONZER

Lumene Invisible Illumination Liquid Bronzer in Summer Glow *(£23.90; boots.com)*

Again a superlight serum, but this one is tinted to give glow and a hint of a tan. Sometimes liquid bronzers can be hard to blend but not this. Yes, apply with warm fingertips, but also try stippling a brush into this liquid and then buff into your skin. It doesn't add coverage, just a healthy glow.

3 THE SOFTEST CREAM BLUSH

e.l.f. Soft Glam Cream Blush *(£7; superdrug.com)*

So many cream blushers have high pigment payoff – great in winter, a disaster on sweaty summer skin. This is really pretty, gives a sheer flush of colour and a hint of a healthy glow without shimmer or shine. What's more, it can be dabbed onto lips for an easy summer look. The Gumball shade is a clear winner for me.

4 THE NO-SMUDGE MASCARA

Sweed Cloud Mascara in Black *(£26; cultbeauty.co.uk)*

In case you didn't know, a tubing mascara is not wax-based but has polymers that coat the lashes then wash away with warm water at the end of the day (in tiny tubes, hence the moniker). Why? This makes them pretty much sweatproof and smudgeproof. Now, there's a downside: no supersized volume (as no fibres) and not much lengthening, but if you want your lashes looking their best and not overly made-up, then summer is the perfect time to try a formula like this.

GETTY IMAGES

Margot Robbie

> I'm sceptical of tinted sunscreens but this one really delivers

5 THE WATERY LIP TINT

Laneige Juicepop Box lip tint *(£15.99, in eight shades; asos.com)*

This is a skin tint but for lips. It's light, and feels like a lip serum with the prettiest hint of a tint. It can be used all over lips for a natural look – simply choose the colour closest to your natural lips – or even applied over one of those long-lasting lip stains for an all-day soft flush that feels like nothing.

6 THE ONE-AND-DONE BROW GEL

Kosas Air Brow *(£20, in ten shades; spacenk.com)*

This really is an idiotproof brow gel/groomer and colour all in one. The small spoolie makes it easy to apply for those of us with less than Cara Delevingne glorious brows, but it will add depth of colour, fill in a few sparse gaps and give a groomed look in seconds. PS: it also covers greys.

7 THE TINTED SPF BASE

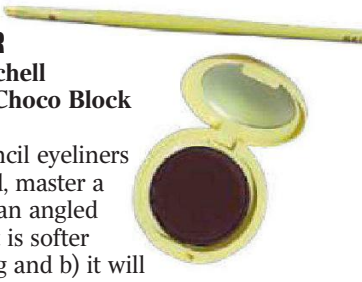
Merit The Uniform Tinted Mineral Sunscreen SPF50 *(£34; sephora.co.uk)*

I am always sceptical of tinted sunscreens but this one really delivers. It is shade-inclusive even on dark skins, it truly is superlight (it is just a top-up SPF, so you'll need a dedicated one if you plan on sitting out in the sun), and it doesn't have a shiny, unflattering finish. In fact it provides a soft-focus, suits-all coverage.

8 THE NEW NAKED EYE

Giorgio Armani Eye Tint *(£33, in 20 shades; boots.com)*

I know, eyeshadow in summer – but hear me out. This feels like a soft serum, adds a wash of colour and blends into skin without stickiness, yet adds the most subtle polished look to eyes, especially if you choose a skin-neutral but defining shade like Sand, Cedar or Tobacco. Foolproof eyeshadow – yes, really.



9 THE SMOKY POWDER LINER

Made By Mitchell Cake Eyeliner in Choco Block *(£13; boots.com)*

Forget smudgy pencil eyeliners in summer; instead, master a powder liner with an angled brush because a) it is softer and more flattering and b) it will not smudge or smear. Just apply to the base of upper lashes, even between them, to make eyes appear more defined, larger and to complete an eye look in seconds. This one can also be applied with a wet brush for a more intense finish in the evening or in winter. But, heads up, with the right angle brush any dark, chocolatey eyeshadow will suffice. ■

Nadine can be found on Instagram @nadinebaggott where she answers all your beauty questions

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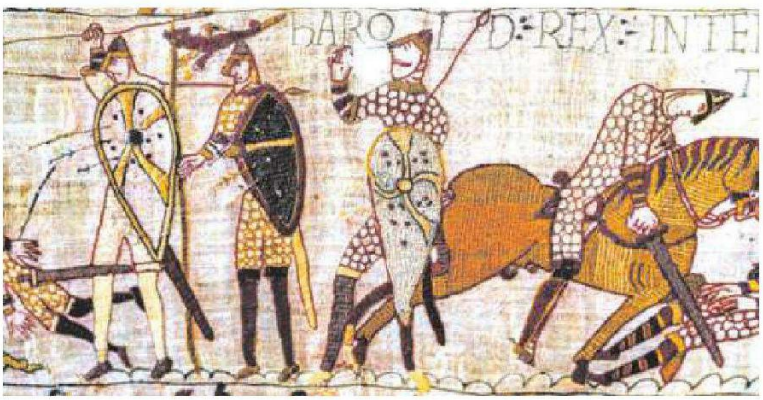

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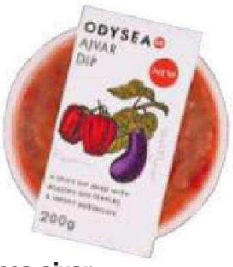
KITCHEN SHORTCUTS

THE FOODIE'S TOP 12 CHEATS

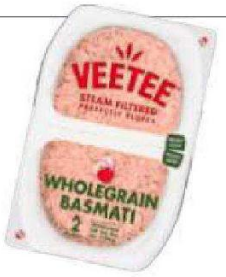
No time to chop? Too busy to char? Tony Turnbull reveals his secret hacks



Odysea ajvar
(200g, £3, waitrose.com)
A Turkish dip of pepper and aubergine that also makes an instant pasta sauce without tasting too "ready-made".

BEST BUY

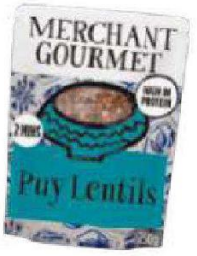
Crispy onions
(100g, £1.80, ocado.com)
I used to make my own. All that slicing, all that oil! Now I just add these to mujadara, that veggie classic of spiced rice and lentils.



Veetee wholegrain basmati rice
(2 x 130g, £1.15, sainsburys.co.uk)
The best brand for microwavable rice, and its wholegrain basmati is the biggest time saver, ready in 1 minute compared with 25 minutes on the stove.

Frozen diced onions
(500g, 99p, aldi.co.uk)
No matter how good your knife skills, onions take time to chop. These will be ready in 5 minutes, start to finish.

Gaea flame-roasted red peppers
(290g, £3.30, ocado.com)
These save you at least 20 minutes of charring, cooling and peeling peppers for anything from shakshuka to couscous salad.



Merchant Gourmet puy lentils
(250g, £2.15, sainsburys.co.uk)
Lazy, I know, but kilo for kilo these are not much more expensive than buying raw. I don't rate the flavoured varieties in the range, though.

So Organic chickpeas
(380g, £1.30, sainsburys.co.uk)
With a pinch of extra salt, these chickpeas are almost as good as a certain brand in jars that cost nearly twice the price.

Ottolenghi smokey honey marinade
(270g, £4, waitrose.com)
The acceptable face of hot honey. I marinate chicken thighs with this but add a little lemon juice into the mix to cut the sweetness.

Belazu basil pesto
(135g, £3, sainsburys.co.uk)
I wouldn't touch the stuff in jars, but this is a handy standby to keep in the fridge.

EDITOR'S PICK

De Cecco gnocchi di patate
(500g, £2.75, tesco.com)
To go with the tub of pesto, obviously. This is my favourite brand because it holds its shape well after cooking.

Spanish crushed tomato bread topper
(250ml, £2.50, ocado.com)
I'm almost too embarrassed to admit to this, but ready-grated tomato? Why not?

Payst Thai green curry paste
(100g, £5.50, payst.co.uk)
I've tried to keep to supermarkets here, but Payst's range of Thai curry pastes, made by the team behind the restaurant Farang, are so brilliant you need to know about them. ■

Eating out
Giles Coren

‘The noodle duvet (very much the duvet of an unmade bed) was wonderful. Kind of a smashed, spicy lasagne’

TOM JACKSON, LOLA LEE

Jiaonest

“So what usually happens now?” said Cindy Yu, putting down her beer and lifting up the menu at Jiaonest in Haggerston in east London.

“Well,” I said. “Usually people go, ‘Ooh, Giles, you know so much about Chinese food, why don’t you order for everyone?’”

Cindy raised an eyebrow.

“But on this occasion, seeing as you’ve been here before, I’m willing to share the responsibility evenly.”

And so, from the “Small plates” section, Cindy ordered the duck duck rice toast and the gourmet flower mushroom, “patiently braised until tender, straight from Chongqing, shaped by its mountain forests, earthy and fragrant”, and the “numbing warning” spiced house salad with crunchy pig ear. And I threw in the jelly noodles, “a beloved summer dish from Chongqing: silky pea noodles tossed in a balanced dressing of nutty, spicy and lightly numbing flavours, lifted by sweetness and acidity”, because it sounded... spiritually uplifting. And then we got the mapo tofu and the medicinal chicken thighs and the noodle duvet and the asparagus and wood ear and that seemed about enough. And Cindy agreed.

You know Cindy. She’s a relatively recent arrival at The Times, having previously been broadcast editor at The Spectator and, crucially, a store manager at Lidl. She was born in Nanjing but came here when she was nine, writes brilliantly about many things, but mostly China, and has the sort of amicable relationship with the Chinese embassy that allows her to politely inquire, “So, any plans to invade Taiwan?” and them to politely reply, “Why would we invade somewhere that is part of China?”

She can and does cook Chinese dishes (which came up when we ordered the mapo) but “embarrassingly I learnt it all from reading Fuchsia Dunlop [the great British trailblazer in Chinese and especially Sichuan cooking], not my mum”. And she was very excited about Jiaonest. When we first met at the end of last year she had suggested lunch and I, being a massive racist, said that I’d love to, as long as she found me a really great Chinese restaurant that I hadn’t been to before.

It took her six months, but she nailed it. Jiaonest is the work of chef/owner Hua Yang, who grew up in her parents’ herbal medicine shop in Chongqing, the supercity (population: 32 million) which

is adjacent to Sichuan and whose cuisine shares the Sichuan dependence upon "mala", the wondrous double fire of numbing Sichuan peppercorn heat (ma) and dried chilli peppers (la).

Hua (who wasn't in that night, or stayed in the kitchen) came to London originally to study spatial design and drifted via east London supper clubs into her own place, which is in an air-conditioned basement on Kingsland Road under a dive called A Bar with Shapes for a Name (a triangle, a square and a circle, if you want to know). It is quite spartan, with uncovered tables, white walls, the odd cat statue, feathers in a vase and a wall-length Chinese medicine cabinet in a lightwell at the far end. Your chair has a drawer in the seat containing medicinal herbs, Sichuan peppercorns etc – speak out of your arse at Jiaonest and it comes out spicy. But it's a mellow atmosphere, quiet jazz, no clatter. No hideous Dalston din. And the food is tremendous.

First out of the blocks were the jelly noodles (£10.50), long, rectilinear, slippery as newborn mice, looking a little like geometrical salsify, firm enough to get up on chopsticks and hang there, doubled over, but likely to break if jiggled, cool on the tongue with a rich peanutty, spicy dressing – welcome on another 33C London evening.

They went very well with an oaky but refreshing Margaret River chardonnay called Treeton, the most expensive white on the list at £72 – not too bad a mark-up. Most of the wine here is "natural", obviously, because it's Hackney, but the Treeton has "minimal" rather than "no" intervention and is perfectly delicious. Easily robust enough to stand up to the mala.

I loved the salad of bitter leaves (£13), which came with a "numbing warning" on account of the Sichuan dressing and the way the crackle of the cool strips of pig's ear folded into the general crunch. The gourmet flower mushroom (£8) was an extraordinary thing: the size and heft of a cricket ball, in five slices, very dense, cool, fleshy, under-a-dead-log-in-the-forest sort of flavours, quite vinaigrous juices when chewed. I liked it but Cindy liked it even more. I mean, she really, really loved it.

After the cool, sour-bland (but not undelicious) flabbiness of the outsized mushroom slices, I was delighted to return to the land of the hot and fatty with the duck duck rice toast (£11.50), which was a quite incredible thing: an unctuous inch-thick braise of fatty duck meat and sticky rice, between slabs of crunchy fried bread, quartered and sesame seeded, that came on like sesame prawn toast straight out of the 1970s Anglo-Cantonese repertoire, but meaty as all hell. A stupendous mouthful. A deep-fried stew. A sandwich for heroes.

The noodle duvet (£10) was wonderful too, the flat sheet of chewy noodle curled up willy-nilly (this was very much the duvet of an unmade bed) with zhajiang (which the menu's brilliant glossary calls "a Sichuan variation built on classic northern Chinese soya bean paste, rich and savoury; traditionally stir-fried with minced meat)", crushed chickpeas and chilli oil. Kind of a smashed, spicy lasagne.

The chicken thighs (£16) were clean, sweet, dainty little chunks which Cindy reckoned "weren't all that medicinal", and the mapo tofu (£16.50) was an elegant, unfussy manifestation of the classic, based on Hua's grandma's recipe, apparently, and not especially spicy. Which I was glad of. Because a fat old white man schwitzing like a roast ham under a heat lamp in front of a young woman in an air-conditioned London basement is not a look I seek to achieve. And then we both, from nowhere, suddenly thought that the best thing of all was the little side dish of shredded asparagus and crunchy black wood ear mushroom (mu'er), barely cooked, just blanched and tossed in a savoury garlic dressing (£7.50). Simple, cute, sweetish and compelling.

It was a hot night and I hadn't ordered the chef's special mala short ribs (£21.50), highly regarded though they seem to be, because I just couldn't face eating anything as heavy as the structural crossbeams that hold a cow together. Nor did we try the steamed whole sea bream in a smoky, charred green chilli sauce (£25.50). But we got across almost everything else and it was a triumph. Reminded me a little, in its being a young, hipsterish bistro whose cuisine just happens to be Chinese, of the late, lamented Mr Ji on Parkway. That didn't survive the horrors of "the current climate" but this will, I am sure. Because you'll be going there twice a month, won't you?

Next week: Hugo Rifkind takes me to a Scottish restaurant (not really. Nobody wants to see that). ■

Jiaonest
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(jiaonest.life)

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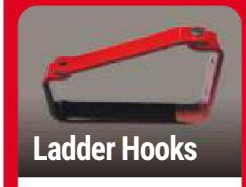

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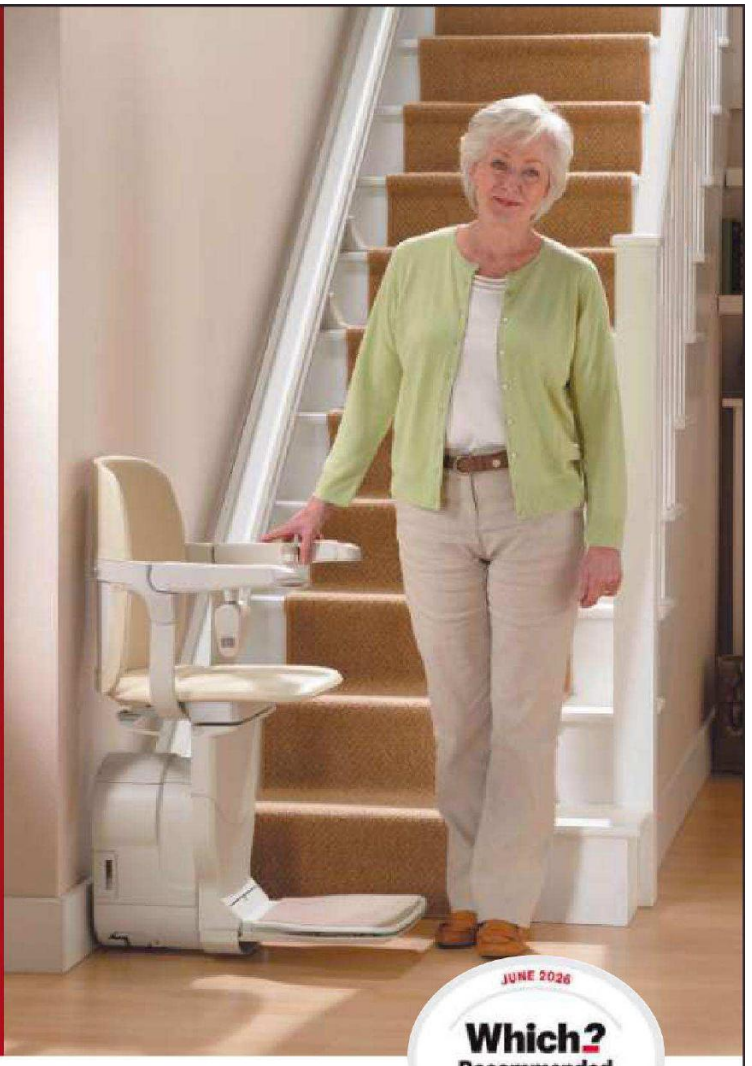

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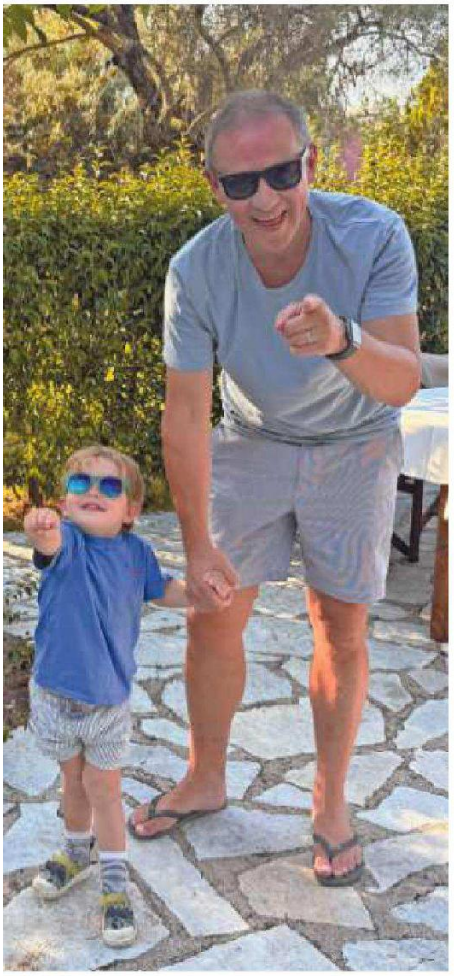

COURTESY OF TOM PECK

Tom Peck in Greece with his two-year-old son

This summer, first by accident and later by design, I have moved into a system I am calling Total Wardrobe. The first rule of Total Wardrobe, and it only has one rule, is that everything I wear, every day without exception, is exactly the same, and I am absolutely loving it.

My TW journey began a couple of months ago when I spotted a bargain online for a three-pack of navy Paul Smith T-shirts. The price was so good (£25 for all three) that I ordered another before the first had arrived. Then I lost the second, so bought a third, but then found it, so now I’ve got nine and I’ve not worn anything else since. It is, as Ricky Gervais and Mr Blobby have discovered, a sublime way to live.

The only thing that’s causing me concern is that the other parents at the school gate may assume I only have one and that I have worn it every day for more than a month, for three consecutive, record-shattering heatwaves. I can’t think of a subtle way to get the word out that I actually have many, apart from maybe writing a newspaper column about it, then posting the link in the class WhatsApp group.

Since the T-shirt revolution, I’ve set upon my wardrobe with Death Star-like destruction. This time last month there were six pairs of chino shorts in there. I decided which were my favourites, bought two more of the same, then chucked the rest. It’s not ideal that they’re dark navy too, as are my two identical dark navy caps. And when you set that entire ensemble off with either of my two identical pairs of black Ray-Bans, it rather means I’ve spent the entire summer dressed like one of those state-backed Russian hooligans who ambushed England fans in Marseille at Euro 2016, though arguably with a fraction less lean muscle mass.

Total Ray-Ban is a bit of risk, actually. On more than one occasion I’ve collected my daughter from school only to get home and discover that pair one is over my eyes and pair two is on my head. A further problem is that I now get served adverts for Paul Smith T-shirts every time I open my laptop, so I was unable to prevent myself from adding a light blue trio, strictly for holiday wear, and then getting my two-year-old boy in on the act too. On holiday in Greece a couple of weeks ago, we regularly wore matching outfits, perhaps appearing to the other hotel guests like a very unlikely pair of Korean honeymooners.

By far the most satisfying substrate of Total Wardrobe is Total Sock. It’s no exaggeration to say that Total Sock is life-changing. I already had nine pairs of plain black Pringle socks when I had to have them Amazon Primed to the in-laws a couple of Christmases ago after accidentally arriving with none. Somehow I’ve still got eight, so I bought four more pairs, and all other socks have now been banished.

You might think that means I’ve got 12 pairs of identical socks, but you’d be wrong. I have no pairs of socks. I have moved beyond the very concept of sock pairs. Now every sock can, and indeed does, pair with any sock of its choosing and then find another suitor as soon as the very next day. My sock drawer is a self-contained Woodsock Festival. It’s even more bacchanalian than that, because everyone in it is a fully practising pansocksual.

Total Flip-flop is also a winner, but to be honest, I’ve been observing that rule almost all my adult life. I realised back in my twenties that if you keep buying the same pair of navy Havaianas, then each pair lasts twice as long, and I’ve stuck to it for two full decades. When flip snaps, buy a new pair but keep hold of flop, then when flop 2.0 perishes, bring the OG flop out of retirement and bosh! You’re flip-flopping again. It’s genius really. Like Trigger’s broom, but for footwear.

Total Pant is another system I’ve been sticking to for a long time. Recently I discovered in my Amazon purchase history that I’ve been buying the same black Calvin Klein three-pack with metronomic regularity since 2009. Some people look at house prices if they want to get depressed about lost decades of economic potential, but my pants tell an even bleaker story.

It’s no exaggeration to say that the cost of a three-pack of Calvin Klein briefs has risen over the past 16 years in almost complete lockstep with my earnings. But I’m middle-aged now, at the peak of my powers. I can buy nine heavily discounted T-shirts in a week without blinking. But what are the youngsters doing? How can they afford pants at all? It’s a bit of a worry. You can’t use avocado toast for everything.

I’m increasingly aware that winter is coming and that it’s going to challenge my devotion to this new way of life. Total Hoodie I’m definitely doing, and Total Jean, but Total Jumper? Total Blazer? Total Chino? Total Work Shirt? Total Coat? I haven’t quite decided, but don’t worry, I’ll keep you informed. ■

Robert Crampton is away

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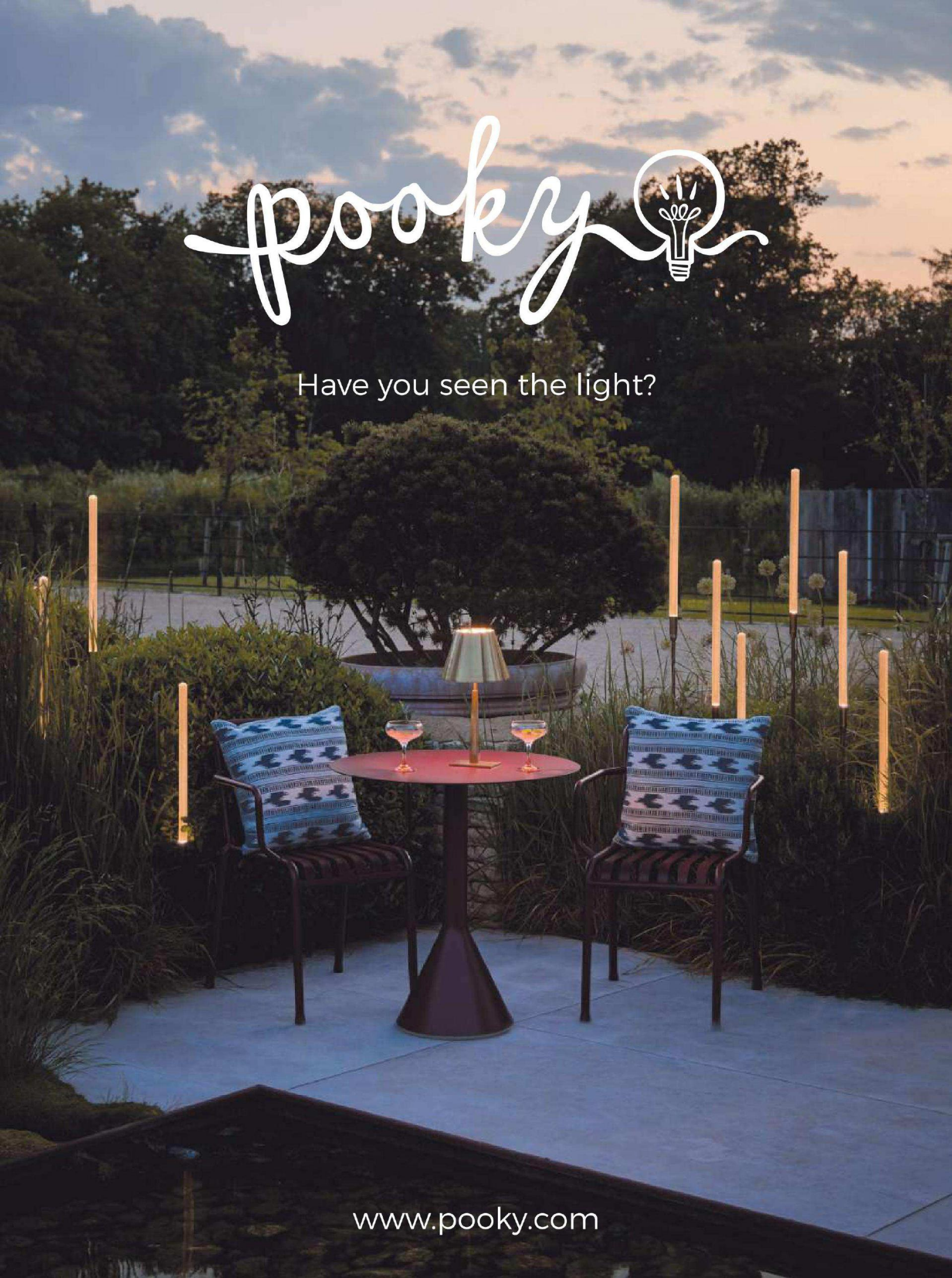
TIMES Events

Caitlin Moran on How to be Hopeful

Join us for a brilliantly funny and uplifting evening as Times columnist **Caitlin Moran** hits the stage for the London instalment of her nationwide tour. In conversation with her friend and colleague – Times Radio presenter **Hugo Rifkind** – Caitlin will unravel the themes of her essential new book, *How to be Hopeful: A Year of Attempting to Feel Less Awful About the World.*

Thursday, September 17 | 7.30pm
St Mary's Church, Bryanston Square, London, W1H 1PQ

Book your tickets at **thetimes.com/events**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